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# THE CRESSET

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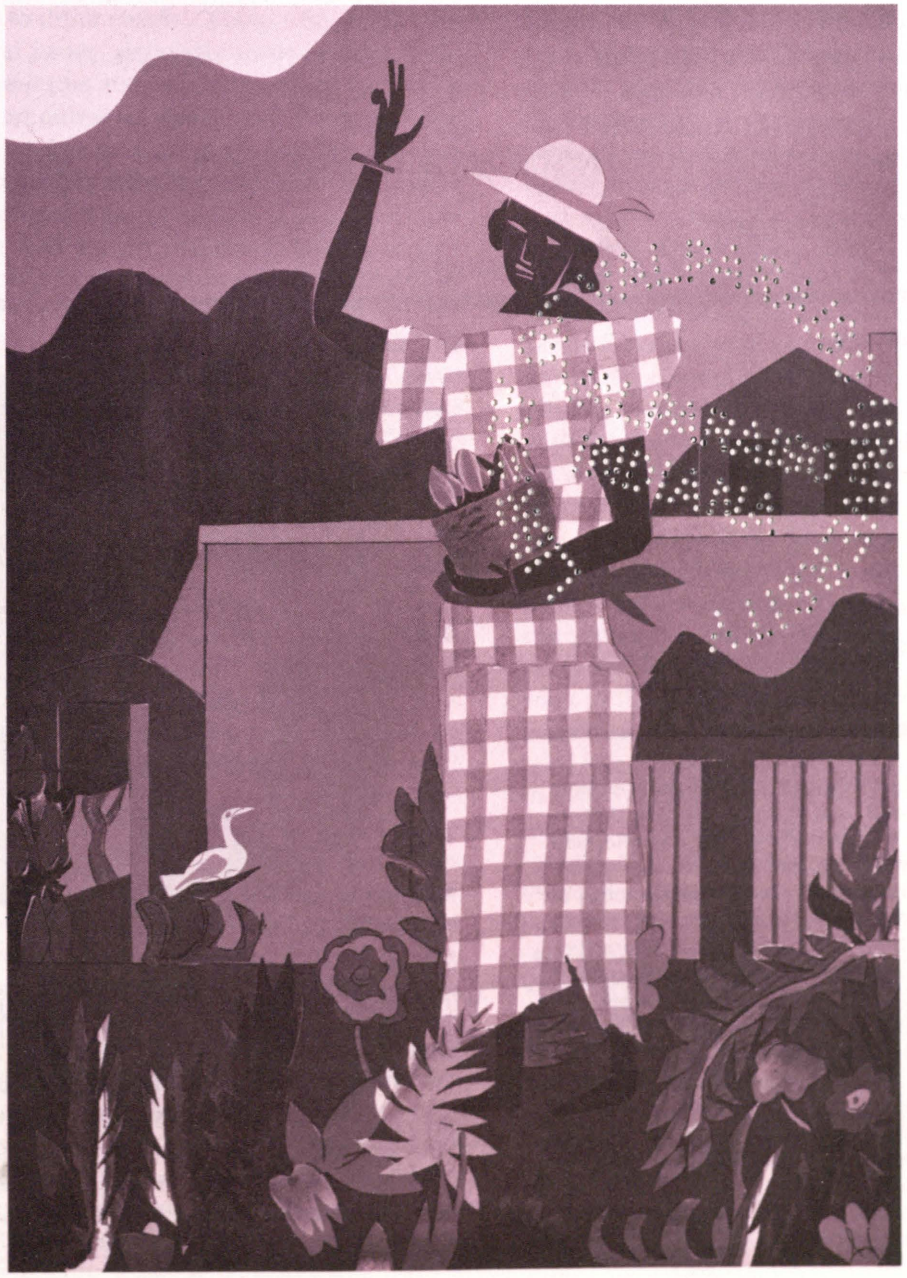

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***Contributors***





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RHWB

# IN LUCE TUA

## *Comment on Contemporary Affairs by the Editor*

### *The Churches and Political Morality*

The first moral duty, as Michael Novak has recently reminded us, is to think clearly. Those who would pronounce on moral issues, especially those in church circles, often assume that the prime requisite for public commentary is an outraged conscience. But moral outrage is a vastly overvalued social commodity. In a society filled with people who have decided that they're mad as hell and aren't going to take it any more, the prudent and rational temper is more to be valued than the socio-political primal screams we so often encounter.

This is not to argue that we should be relaxed or indifferent in the presence of injustice or when faced with the threat of war (especially nuclear war). But good societies and a peaceful world are more likely to emerge from hard and disciplined thought than from emotional outbursts. It is not enough to proclaim one's concern for the poor or to announce one's opposition to war, as if moral pronouncements and declarations of intent might in themselves have some effect on the way the world works. The greatest temptation for those concerned with public issues is to assume that proclamation of good will is itself a moral act. Unfocused expression of moral concern, no matter how intense, does no one any good—except to the extent that it serves as a form of therapy for those indulging in it. (I care; therefore I must be a good person.)

The moralistic approach to political commentary assumes that the primary cause of our social difficulties—at least in domestic affairs—lies in a lack of concern among those who are relatively better off for those who are relatively worse off. For orthodox Christians, that view holds a natural attraction. No moral philosopher ever went wrong overestimating the natural self-interest of the human creature. We are not by nature—or even often by nurture—altruistic beings.

But there is another side to the matter. Part—and no small part—of our self interest is to think well of ourselves. Despite all the talk of a renewed social Darwinism in America, few of us have any desire to live in a social jungle in which only the fit (the most brutal) survive and in which our moral concerns extend no further than our own needs. That is not only because we fear that we might be losers rather than winners in such a jungle, but also because that sort of existence would be repugnant to the moral/religious values almost all of us cling to. We need to preserve the sense of ourselves as decent people, and that in turn requires that our natural concern to further our own interests not exclude at least a measure of concern for the needs of others.

It simply is not true that most people are indifferent to the fate of their fellow citizens. They want to do what is right. Self-interest comes first, which means that no social system based on an assumption of altruism can survive, but the great majority of people want to reconcile their personal interests with a larger general interest. We may tend too easily to identify our own good with the general good or to rationalize personal special advantages as necessary to public progress, but most of us have a genuine desire to advance along with rather than at the expense of those around us.

If this analysis is correct, it would seem to follow that those who seek improvement in our social life might concentrate less on rhetorical bludgeonings of the citizenry for their moral callousness and more on finding ways to make the political economy work in ways that provide the greatest good for the greatest number. We need not assume that economic life is a zero-sum game in which the poor can only improve their situation at the expense of those higher up on the economic ladder. Indeed, the mainstream of American social thought, though committed to a competitive economic system, has been rooted in assumptions of collective advance or retreat rather than of group or class conflict. Similarly, when we speak of issues of war and peace, it makes more sense to assume that our divisions lie between those who disagree on the best road to peace rather than between peacelovers and warmongers. In any case, our dreams of social progress are more likely to be realized through careful intellectual analysis than through the mobilizing of moral outrage.

Church groups have a particular susceptibility to substituting moral passion for intellectual precision. It is

***Reinhold Niebuhr was a great moral philosopher because his moral passion never floated free from his undeceived intellect and his respect for the enormous complexities of human community.***

of course the proper function of church bodies to see to it that the moral aspects of public policy issues not be ignored, but it is too often the case that churches reduce complex political questions simply to the presence or absence of moral earnestness. They regularly oversimplify the moral dimensions of policy issues or disregard economic and social realities in addressing moral concerns. And when, as then customarily happens, politicians proceed to ignore the churches' solemn preachments, they find themselves condemned by activist churchmen as morally insensitive.

We are reminded in this regard of an occasion several years ago when we attended a church convention at which a group of activists brought forward a motion calling for a guaranteed annual income (GAI). Now there is much to be said for such a policy. It could well be argued that in a society as rich as ours, we should find it possible to construct a scheme whereby no family's income would be allowed to fall below a certain prescribed level. But there are potential difficulties as well: 1) depending on the level at which the guaranteed income were set, it could be prohibitively expensive, achievable only at the cost of punitive taxation or of renewed waves of inflation; 2) if the GAI were set too high, it would act as a powerful disincentive to work and could thus create new patterns of dependency and lead to depletion of the work force; 3) a scheme by which people were guaranteed a minimum income as a matter of social right, regardless of whether they attempted to find work for themselves, would raise important issues of equity, it being at least arguable that the indolent have no moral claim to support from the rest of society.

But for those at the convention behind the GAI proposal, none of these cautionary warnings deserved serious attention. Indeed, those who raised them became subject to a form of moral bullying. When objections were made that the proposal as written failed to meet the test of political prudence (the level set for the GAI, for example, was so high as to be economically absurd) they were simply dismissed with the suggestion that those putting them forward were guilty of bad faith. It would have been difficult for any politician examining the proposal or observing the debate to take the whole exercise seriously, yet the proposers could leave the convention piously satisfied that they had "done something" for the poor or had at the very least offered a "prophetic witness."

What happened at that convention describes in microcosm much of what happens whenever the church concerns itself with social issues. A great deal of effort and good will gets expended in the passage of resolutions and declarations of intent that are seldom read and almost never acted on. Most churchmen know that their statements have little effect on political calculations or public policy. Too many of them, however, rationalize their own irrelevance by attributing it to morally deficient political leaders and followers who, out of narrow self-interest and resistance to ethical demands, turn a deaf ear to the church's truth-telling. That no doubt occurs in certain circumstances, but we are convinced that in most instances the churches are ignored not because they are prophetic but because they are ignorant, ideologically biased, or morally unsophisticated. The churches can only expect to be listened to—will only deserve to be listened to—when they learn to treat public affairs in a morally serious manner.

The example of Reinhold Niebuhr is instructive. (Niebuhr is a wonderful resource in these matters not least because he commands attention right across the political spectrum: liberals and radicals like him because of the substantive political positions he characteristically adopted, while conservatives are drawn to the theological and philosophical assumptions behind the politics.) Niebuhr's influence on the political life of his time, probably the greatest any modern American theologian has exerted, stemmed from his admirable toughmindedness. Though often a minority voice—he tended to go as often against the political grain as with it—Niebuhr commanded near-universal respect because he consistently refused either to sentimentalize or to oversimplify. One might not agree with him, but one had to take him seriously.

Thus Niebuhr understood that there can be no useful writing about politics that ignores questions of power. Unlike the great majority of clerical commentators on politics, he neither damned power as intrinsically evil—though he understood that to engage seriously in politics is to implicate oneself in moral ambiguity—nor attempted to exorcise its influence by denying its presence. He knew, given the perversities of human nature and the amoral character of the groups and institutions that jostle for political advantage, that politics is no place for those determined to remain unsullied by the world.

More broadly, he recognized that political conflict seldom reduces itself to unambiguous conflicts between good and evil. The best we can hope to achieve, he suggested, is the relatively better. That offers a dispiriting prospect for those who dream of the City of God or who yearn for climactic triumphs over the forces of evil, but it describes the political world as it is and not as a sentimentalized ethic would have it be. Niebuhr was a great moral philosopher because his moral passion never floated free from his undeceived intellect and his respect for the enormous complexities of human community.

Now one does not turn oneself into a Reinhold Niebuhr (even without the brilliance) simply by an act of will

***For politicians and moral philosophers alike, the concept of trade-offs can be a useful reality principle, one that reduces our tendency to think of moral progress in unproblematic terms.***

or a determination to see the world with as much clarity and depth as one can muster. But there are habits of mind that anyone can cultivate which might help us habitually to think of public affairs in ways that avoid the trap of facile moralizing. One way is to see the world in the way that economists do. Economists, of course, are not without their faults: they have often claimed a precision for their views and forecasts that events have made an embarrassment of. Economics is less a science and more an art than is often conceded by its practitioners. But economists have the great saving grace of seeing the world in terms of trade-offs. They do not customarily assume that a society can pursue any good, or any set of goods, without costs. They know that to pursue one good is to forego another. It is difficult to deal with unemployment and inflation at the same time. Or freedom and equality. Or conservation and expansion. Or rapid growth and economic stability. We cannot achieve all good things all at once. That seems obvious enough when we put it in such blank terms, yet so often political moralists ignore that self-evident truth and talk as if there could be, if only we willed it, a world without substantial pain or cost. (For further development of this argument, see "The Dilemmas of Political Choice" in the November, 1981 *Cresset.*)

This is not a failing peculiar to those on the political Left. Of the various criticisms that might be made of President Reagan's economic program, for example, perhaps the most telling would be that it pretended that it could achieve simultaneous advance on all fronts—and all without sacrifice or even discomfort. Thus we were assured that the country could in one fell swoop cut taxes, increase investment and profits, fight inflation, reduce unemployment, expand military expenditures, and balance the budget. It didn't turn out that way, of course, and now the Reagan Administration is paying political costs for visiting us with economic costs it assured us we would not have to endure. A bit more sobriety earlier on might have saved the Administration at least some of the political embarrassment it is currently suffering. The *New York Times* recently concluded that the "stench of failure" now hangs over the Reagan Administration. That, we think, is an exaggeration, but it is one invited by the President's initial undisciplined optimism.

Thus for politicians and moral philosophers alike, the concept of trade-offs can be a useful reality principle, one that reduces our tendency to think of moral progress in unproblematic terms. There are no free lunches and there is no unobstructed route to social improvement. Not only do we have to make difficult choices in establishing our social priorities (e.g., deciding at any given time whether our first need is to fight unemployment or to reduce inflation), we also have to realize that some of our most cherished values exist in perpetual conflict with one another (e.g., human freedom and human equality).

Michael Novak has suggested another habit of mind conducive to the clear thinking he identifies as our primary moral duty. It is his contention that much of the air of unreality surrounding so many churchly pronouncements on public affairs stems less from the fuzzy social gospel theology behind the pronouncements (though there is plenty of that) than from a refusal or inability to deal with political and economic reality. Thus, Novak argues, churchmen regularly become apologists for squalid left-wing tyrannies not only, or even mainly, because of their utopian illusions but because of their failure to see and analyze things as they are. We need, in other words, as a prerequisite for intelligent commentary on public policy a healthy respect for facts and knowledge and a willingness to let our views be shaped by them.

Nowhere is this need more apparent than in religious commentary on economic affairs. One constantly encounters the most sweeping and confident generalizations on economic matters by church spokesmen whose knowledge of economic systems is based on a seminary course in The Church and Social Justice and which remains wholly untainted by acquaintance with economic theory. The widespread rejection of capitalism and support for socialism among left-wing clergy stems less, one suspects, from comparative economic analysis than from the conviction that economics is finally a sub-field of ethics and does not require understanding on its own terms. How else explain the common observation in church circles that "socialism is applied Christianity"? (This is not to argue, of course, that no serious economist can be a socialist; it is to argue that the case for socialism must be made in terms that take into account economic reality.)

Robert Benne, the Christian ethicist whose recent book *The Ethic of Democratic Capitalism: A Moral Reassessment* has attracted widespread notice, has commented on the failure within our colleges and universities of humanists and social scientists, theologians and economists, to engage regularly in mutual conversation and instruction. His is not simply another earnest and banal plea for interdisciplinary dialog. It is rather a concerned appeal by an ethicist worried that too much moral/religious discussion of public affairs emerges out of a knowledge vacuum. Before one decides whether to praise capitalism or to denounce it, one should first make a serious attempt to understand how it and its competitors work.

We do not mean to suggest that moral questions concerning economics, politics, or international affairs should be left only to people technically expert in those

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fields. We are all aware that technical mastery of a field bestows no necessary insight into its moral implications. Indeed, it can act as an obstacle to such insight, as practitioners of a field fall prey to a kind of technical determinism whereby their decisions flow simply from practical considerations unrefined by moral reflection. Thus scientists can so preoccupy themselves with the intricacies of their research as to ignore any questions of value that arise from it.

But if knowledge of a field cannot guarantee moral understanding of it, ignorance can guarantee moral understanding's absence. It will not do for churches to argue that they are concerned only with the moral aspects of economic systems or of nuclear strategy: they can only offer useful moral critiques of those problems over which they have first managed to establish some degree of intellectual mastery. That which we would change we must first attempt to comprehend.

An enormous amount of attention has focused recently on the attempt by American Catholic bishops to put together a pastoral letter on nuclear weapons and their use. The statement has already gone through several drafts and a final version will appear later this year. Detailed discussion of the statement in these columns will await its final formulation, but it is not too soon to specify the grounds on which the bishops' efforts will deserve to be evaluated. We ought not waste time worrying whether the bishops have displayed "courage," "vision," "prophetic judgment," or any other of the overblown and largely meaningless phrases that normally accompany such declarations. What we want from the bishops above all is moral seriousness—which is to say that we want a statement that deals with the topic in all its complexity and that does not apply to it an ethical norm that those in positions of responsibility for national security could only meet by resigning from office. The Catholic tradition has always insisted that the Christian must follow conscience—but a conscience rightly instructed. We hope that the bishops will test the urgings of conscience against the realities of a world in which Isaiah's vision of swords beat into plowshares remains an eschatological hope and not a guide to public policy.

It is often supposed that pleas for recognition of "complexity" in public affairs simply serve as covers for evasion of moral duty. In some cases, perhaps so. But that does not dispose of the issue. It is a fundamental axiom of intellectual activity that the deeper we penetrate into any subject the more complicated and uncertain we discover it to be. The neophyte in a field finds sweeping judgments easy; the expert almost never does. To learn is to advance from simplicity to complexity. Why should the case be different with the moral analysis of politics? Those who approach moral judgments armed only with a tender conscience and a handful of quotations from the Old Testament may have their uses as moral cheerleaders, but they should never become our moral instructors.

Liberal church bodies such as the National and World Councils of Churches find themselves under frequent attacks for the inadequacy of their political commentary. Their understandable reaction is to dismiss such attacks as based in ignorance or ideological prejudice. But that is not necessarily the case. A number of people who are themselves on the Left—such as the editors of the liberal *New Republic*—have in recent months joined in the criticisms. The liberal churches would do well to learn from their critics and to remind themselves that moral philosophy is an intellectual activity and not simply an exercise in politicized piety.

### *foxes*

mist hangs heavily on the wilted
flowers
in the iron earth
cold birds twitch
on the wires
running over fields
frozen into glass

there is no way to tell you
today that the cold
will last a few months
and then will thaw
there is no way to reach you
to have you understand
you should return

these hopping birds
like clots of coal
outside my steaming window
cannot find you
to bring you here

and so the windows close with breath
and the taut wires thrum along
curving banks of snow
where foxes snuffle and burrow
dying awhile
their eyes wide
in dreamy blank wonder

**J. T. Ledbetter**

***The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod deplores the divisions that exist in Christendom. It finds it sad that brothers and sisters in Christ find themselves in a multitude of separated denominations.***

# The Missouri View of Lutheran Unity

## Distinguishing Between Spiritual Unity and External Unity

**Samuel H. Nafzger**

(*Editor's Note: The recent decision by the Lutheran Church in America, the American Lutheran Church, and the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches to form a new Lutheran church body by 1988 marks perhaps the most significant event in American Lutheran history. In recognition of that fact,* The Cresset *has commissioned two essays on Lutheran unity, the first by Dr. Nafzger below setting out the view of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod on the subject, and the second, which will appear soon, by a supporter of the new Lutheran church.*)

The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod deplores the divisions which exist in contemporary Christendom. It saddens us that brothers and sisters in Christ find themselves in a multitude of separated denominations. It is particularly painful for us that not even those of us who bear the name of Martin Luther, whose 500th birthday we are celebrating this year, are able to kneel at Christ's altar together to receive Christ's true Body and Blood. We believe that this state of affairs is contrary to God's will. Together with the Lutheran Confessors of the sixteenth century we earnestly pray for and seek to live together in godly peace and concord with all those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. We in the LCMS share in that true ecumenical goal that "all of us embrace and adhere to a single, true religion and live together in unity and in one fellowship and church, even as we are all enlisted under one Christ" (AC Preface, 4).

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If all this is so, then why is it that the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod is not a member of the World Council of Churches, the National Council of Churches, or even of the Lutheran World Federation? If Missouri Lutherans so ardently desire to live together in "one fellowship and church" with all believers in Christ, why is it that we are not one of the participants in the present negotiations to form a new Lutheran church in the United States? The purpose of this article is to present the position of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod on the question of Lutheran unity and, at least by implication, on the larger question of the modern ecumenical movement. In order to accomplish this goal, it will be necessary first of all to say something about the spiritual unity of the church. Next we will take up the question of external unity in the church. Only then will we be able to speak to the question of the LCMS on Lutheran unity.

### Getting Back to the Beginnings

To get a proper perspective on the spiritual unity of the church, it is necessary that we go back to the very first verse in the Bible, which tells us that "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). The last verse of this first chapter tells us that "God saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good" (Gen. 1:31). From this we learn that God, our God, the only God, is the Creator of the universe. This Creator God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is not just the God of Lutherans or Protestants or Christians, but He is the Lord of the universe, the King of kings. Moreover, these first verses of the Bible tell us that everything the Lord our God created was good and that it was characterized by perfect peace and harmony.

But the third chapter of this first book in the Bible also tells us that God's good creation did not stay good, and the chapters which follow describe in graphic detail the disastrous consequences of the "fall into sin." In every sphere of God's creation the Fall continues to

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manifest itself in division and separation. As a result of sin the whole world stands under condemnation and is out of joint. Because the creature which had been created in the image of God disobeyed its Creator, the entire human race is at enmity with God and with itself. Brother fights against brother, death exists in the universe, and even nature itself testifies to the reality of the curse of sin in the form of earthquakes, droughts, floods, and the like. Life in our world is characterized by division, by pain and tragedy, and by a lack of purpose and direction.

It is into this "darkness" which the marvelous light of God's Gospel has shined (John 1:5; 1 Peter 2:9). St. Paul writes: "When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive the adoption as sons" (Gal. 4:4). The infinite Creator, in opposition to all human logic, entered time so that He might become the Savior of the World. Wherever this Good News is proclaimed in Word and sacrament, there the Holy Spirit is active, working faith in Christ in human hearts. The treasures of the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation belong to those who have been brought to faith in Christ (Titus 3:5-7). They become one with Him (1 Cor. 1:9). St. Paul writes to the Galatians that "in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:26-27).

## *Unity With Christ and One Another*

Spirit-wrought faith not only places believers in Christ into a spiritual unity with their Lord, but it also unites them with one another. The Apostle Paul refers to Christ as "the Head of the body, the church" (Col. 1:18), and he writes to the Romans that "we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another" (Rom. 12:5). The New Testament uses a variety of other images to emphasize that there is only one church. Jesus speaks of one shepherd and one fold (John 10:16), and He says: "I am the Vine, and you are the branches" (John 15:5). St. Peter speaks of living stones with Christ himself being the chief cornerstone (1 Peter 2:5-6). St. Paul tells the Galatians that "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female" among those who put on Christ in Baptism, for they are "all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

This means that despite all appearances to the contrary and despite all of the external divisions in contemporary Christendom, there is a very real sense in which it is correct to say that there is only one church in heaven and on earth. St. Paul describes this unity of the church most beautifully in his letter to the Ephesians: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:4-6).

Christians of all ages therefore confess in the words of the Nicene Creed (381 A.D.) that they "believe one holy, Christian, and apostolic church." As article VII of the Augsburg Confession makes clear, this unity of the church is not something that results from human striving and negotiating. It is rather a unity produced by the Holy Spirit. The one, holy, Christian Church "is the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel" (AC VII, 1). This "true spiritual unity" of the church, as Melanchthon calls it in his commentary on this passage (Ap VII & VIII, 31), transcends space and time. It binds together all believers in Christ, wherever they may be, in a relationship "which will be and remain forever" (AC VII, 1).

On the basis of this understanding of the spiritual unity of the church as it is taught in the Scriptures and presented in the Lutheran Confessions, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod holds that "there is *one* holy Christian Church on earth, the Head of which is Christ and which is gathered, preserved, and governed by Christ through the Gospel" and that this church "is to be found not only in those external church communions which teach the Word of God purely in every part, but also where, along with error, so much of the Word of God still remains that men may be brought to the knowledge of their sins and to faith in the forgiveness of sins, which Christ has gained for all men."[1] This spiritual unity is a matter of faith in the heart, and therefore no human eye can see it.[2] But we can be sure that, wherever the Gospel is preached and the sacraments are administered, there the Holy Spirit is at work binding human hearts to Christ and to one another (Is. 55:11;

[1] *Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod,* 1932, pp. 12-14. Cf. Reports of the LCMS Commission on Theology, e.g., "Theology of Fellowship," 1967, p. 7; "A Lutheran Stance Toward Ecumenism," 1974, p. 9; "The Nature and Implications of the Concept of Fellowship," 1981, pp. 9-11.

[2] Cf. Peter Brunner, "The Realization of Church Fellowship," *The Unity of the Church: A Symposium* (Rock Island, Ill.: Augustana Press, 1957), p. 13. Brunner writes: "The unity of the church is unquestionably constantly given. The unity of the spiritual body of Jesus is indestructible. . . . When we take this seriously, we cannot formulate our task in the ecumenical consultations to be the establishing of the unity of the Church of Jesus Christ. Contrariwise, we must derive our ecumenical obligation from the unity of the church that is continually given. We should not formulate our task in such a way as to say that we have to make the unity of the church of God visible on earth. For we cannot visibly draw the lines of division which truly separate the living members of the body of Jesus from those who will not inherit the kingdom of God. This line of separation is seen now only by the eye of God. Therefore the unity of the Church of God will only first be manifest for our eyes in the apocalyptic revelation of the kingdom of God."

Heb. 4:12). This is the spiritual unity of the church.

Although the spiritual unity *of* the church is a present reality, external unity *in* the church most certainly is not. Sad to say, it never has been. Disagreements and divisions in the church are not unique to modern times, even though the splintering of the church into literally hundreds of denominations is.

Not even the early church was immune from the divisive nature of sin. Personality conflicts, immoral behavior, and false teachers and teachings all served to disturb and rend the external unity of the church.

## Warnings of False Prophets

Jesus himself had warned his followers: "Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits" (Matt. 7:15-16a). Shortly before his death on the cross He told his disciples that "many shall come in my name, saying I am Christ, and shall deceive many" (Matt. 24:5).

These warnings against false teachers found almost instant application. Time after time the apostles found their proclamation of the Gospel endangered and undermined by false prophets. Paul was astonished that the Galatians so quickly followed after those who "distort the gospel of Christ" (Gal. 1:7). He exhorts the Colossians not to let anyone take them "captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men" (Col. 2:8), and he warns the Corinthians against "false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ" (2 Cor. 11:13). He solemnly charges Timothy to preach the Word in season and out of season, "for the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they . . . turn away from the truth and will turn aside to myths" (2 Tim. 4:1-4). St. Luke reports that "some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brethren, 'Unless you are circumcized according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved'" (Acts 15:1).

But it was not only false teachings which disturbed the external unity of the church, but other matters as well. Immediately following the disagreement concerning circumcision, St. Luke tells us that "a sharp contention" arose between Paul and Barnabas over who should accompany them on their missionary journey, with the result that "they separated from each other" (Acts 15:39). In the introductory words of his first letter to the Corinthians the Apostle Paul speaks of serious dissensions caused by false loyalties in this congregation: "It has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brethren. What I mean is that each of you says, 'I belong to Paul,' or 'I belong to Apollos,' or 'I belong to Cephas,' or 'I belong to Christ'" (1 Cor. 1:11-12). Later in this letter, Paul rebukes disorder resulting from immorality and loveless legal redress against a fellow member of the congregation (1 Cor. 5, 6).

The Apostle Paul lays down the basic principle to be followed in seeking external unity in the church in his letter to the Ephesians: "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:1-3). In other words, *the unity of the Spirit produces love which works toward external unity in the church, but love will always seek to do this in such a way that will serve to maintain and to extend the spiritual unity of the church.*

In accordance with this same principle, the Apostle appeals to the factious Corinthians "by the name of our Lord Jesus, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10). But he recognizes that this principle may in certain situations lead Christians to exercise church discipline and even the removal of a member from the Christian fellowship, although it be with many tears (1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 2:4). He tells the Thessalonians: "If anyone refuses to obey what we say in this letter, note that man, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. Do not look on him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother" (2 Thess. 3:14-15). Where there is disagreement in the teaching of the Gospel, the Apostle exhorts the Christians in Rome: "I appeal to you brethren, to take note of those who create dissensions and difficulties, in opposition to the doctrine which you have taught; avoid them" (Rom. 16:17).[3] He uses even stronger language in his letter to the Galatians: "As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:9).

It is in the light of this understanding of the spiritual unity *of* the church and external unity *in* the church that the Lutheran Confessors consider the ecumenical task. For them the spiritual unity of the church is the presupposition, not the goal, of ecumenical endeavors. Because they were one in Christ with their fellow believers in other churches, they sought agreement with them in the confession of their faith. The Preface to the Augsburg Confession therefore states: "We are prepared . . . to discuss . . . insofar as this can honorably be done, such practical and equitable ways as may restore unity. Thus the matters at issue between us . . . may be discussed

[3]For an excellent treatment of this passage, see Martin Franzmann, "Exegesis on Romans 16:17ff.," *Concordia Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (January 1981), pp. 13-20.

amicably and charitably, our differences may be reconciled, and we may be united in one, true religion, even as we are all under one Christ and should confess and contend for Christ" (AC Preface, 10).

For the Confessors, only one thing was necessary for unity in the church—agreement in the confession of the faith. "Churches will not condemn each other because of a difference in ceremonies, when in Christian liberty one uses fewer or more of them, as long as they are otherwise agreed in doctrine and in all its articles and are also agreed concerning the right use of the holy sacraments" (FC SD X, 31). The compromise of the teaching of the Gospel is not an option for them: "We have no intention . . . to yield anything of the eternal and unchangeable truth of God for the sake of temporal peace, tranquility, and outward harmony. . . . We desire such harmony . . . that will not give place to the smallest error" (FC SD X, 94-96). When debating the doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ's body and blood in the sacrament, Luther steadfastly refuses to seek unity in the church by compromising the truth: "Whoever, I say, will not believe this, will please let me alone and expect no fellowship from me. This is final" (FC SD VII, 33).

The way to achieve external unity in the church for the Confessors is to confess the truth and to expose error. "In order to preserve the pure doctrine and to maintain a thorough, lasting, and God-pleasing concord within the church, it is essential not only to present the true and wholesome doctrine correctly, but also to accuse the adversaries who teach otherwise" (FC SD Rule and Norm, 14). "The primary requirement for basic and permanent concord within the church is a summary formula and pattern, unanimously approved, in which the summarized doctrine commonly confessed by the churches of the pure Christian religion is drawn together out of the Word of God" (FC SD Rule and Norm, 1).

It is this understanding of the *spiritual unity of the church* and of *external unity in the church* to which the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod seeks to be faithful as it relates to other Lutherans and also to other Christian churches.[4] On the one hand, we in the Missouri Synod believe that divisions in the church are the result of sin and are contrary to God's will. The first objective of the Synod therefore sets forth the goal of working "through its official structure toward fellowship with other Christian church bodies" and the providing of a united defense against schism and sectarianism (LCMS Constitution, Article III, 1). Holding to the Scriptural teaching that faith binds together all believers in the one, holy, Christian church, we seek to take seriously the exhortation to manifest this unity in Christ so that "the world may believe" (John 17:21). We are saddened by and abhor the *skandalon* of division which a divided Christendom presents to the world. We reject the view that there is room in the church for either "party spirit" or sectarian separation. And we ask for God's forgiveness where our performance has failed to correspond to our profession in this area.

## Pursuing Consensus in Doctrine

In order to work toward the goal of Lutheran unity, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has consistently and repeatedly expressed its desire to engage in discussions with other Lutherans.[5] One of the factors which was most influential in leading the Synod in 1965 to become a member of the Lutheran Council in America (LCUSA) was the stipulation that participation in its Division of Theological Studies, the purpose of which is to seek consensus in doctrine in a systematic and continuing way, was mandatory.[6]

Since the Scriptures are silent regarding specific matters of organization and polity, the Synod holds that many factors need to be taken into account in deciding whether the achievement of "agreement in doctrine and practice" will result in altar and pulpit fellowship or organic merger. The practice of church fellowship under either arrangement is the same, and mutual agreement "in doctrine and in all its articles" and in "the right use of the holy sacraments" (FC SD X, 31) is the Scriptural requirement for both.[7] In 1971 the Synod stated that "at this time, it is primarily oriented toward altar and pulpit fellowship and further cooperative activities, rather than organic union."[8]

[4] In recent years the Synod has participated in the bilateral discussions between Lutherans and Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Reformed, Baptist, Methodist, Conservative/Evangelical, and Episcopalian churches. The Synod takes part in these dialogs "for the purpose of identifying areas of agreement and of disagreement and for the sake of giving a Lutheran witness to the truth as it is revealed in the Scriptures and confessed in the Lutheran Symbols." *Convention Workbook*, "Guidelines for LCMS Participation in Ecumenical Dialogs," 1975, p. 50. Cf. 1981 Res.3-09 "To Continue Discussions with Other Christians."

[5] See, for example, two resolutions adopted by the LCMS at its 1981 convention. Res. 3-06 resolves "that the Synod assure the American Lutheran Church, the Lutheran Church in America, and the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches of its continuing desire to seek agreement in Biblical and confessional doctrine and practice, whether those church bodies continue to exist as denominations or in a new organizational structure." Res. 3-08 invites "the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, and the Evangelical Lutheran Federation to engage in doctrinal discussions intended to lead toward declaration of altar and pulpit fellowship." Cf. also 1979 Res. 3-09 "To Encourage Theological Discussions with the LCA"; 1977 Res. 3-20 "To Encourage Fellowship Discussions with All Lutheran Church Bodies"; 1975 Resolution 3-02 "To Reaffirm the Desire to Establish Fellowship with the Lutheran Church of Australia"; 1971 Resolution 3-14 "To Encourage Continued Discussion with the Lutheran Church in America" and Res. 3-21 "To Seek Better Relations with the American Lutheran Church."

***It is because of disagreement in doctrine that the Missouri Synod broke with the American Lutheran Church; that is also why it is not a participant in the negotiations to form a new Lutheran church.***

On the other hand, just as the Synod takes seriously the spiritual unity of the church and the Scriptural mandates to manifest it, so we also seek to be faithful to the Scriptural requirements for external unity in the church. Therefore the Synod's constitution rejects not only schism and sectarianism but "heresy" as well.[9] Since the Scriptures teach that external unity in the church is a matter of the right confession of the prophetic and apostolic faith, the Synod holds that church fellowship (or merger) between church bodies in doctrinal disagreement with each other is contrary to God's will. It was because of disagreement in doctrine that the Missouri Synod ended its altar and pulpit fellowship relationship with the American Lutheran Church in 1981,[10] and this is also the reason why the Synod is not a participant in the present negotiations to form a new Lutheran church.[11] Agreement in doctrine is the indispensable prerequisite for such participation.

## Doctrine for the Sake of the Gospel

The Missouri Synod does not insist on agreement in doctrine merely for the sake of agreement or only out of obedience to the Scripture, but also because of our conviction, together with the Lutheran Confessors, that all the articles of faith are so integrally related to the simple Gospel of the forgiveness of sin through faith in Christ that error in any article threatens the Gospel itself (cf., e.g., Ap II, 44; XII, 44; XII, 77; XV, 4; XXI, 14; XXVII, 23, 24). Dr. Ralph Bohlmann, President of the LCMS, put it this way in his address to the 1982 conventions of the church bodies participating in the negotiations to form a new Lutheran church:

> Biblical "doctrine" is not something apart from or alongside the Gospel, but simply the articulation of the many aspects of the Gospel. To be concerned about agreement in doctrine is to be concerned about the confession of the Gospel itself.

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[6] Cf. 1965 Res. 3-12 "To Enter Proposed Lutheran Council in the United States of America." The introduction to this resolution states "In keeping with the historic efforts of our Synod to promote theological discussions for the purpose of bringing about a greater unity in doctrine and practice among the Lutherans of America, the 1962 convention of the Synod asked the President to appoint seven representatives of the Synod to meet with a similar number of representatives from other Lutheran church bodies in the United States willing to enter into conversations regarding our inter-Lutheran church agency. (*Proceedings*, 1962, p. 109).

"Three meetings were held. . . . Six essays were read . . . which 'showed a degree of basic agreement in Lutheran faith and conviction' and also 'that we do not have that full agreement in doctrine and practice which we of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod consider essential to the establishment of pulpit and altar fellowship.' These facts 'have dictated the nature and function of the proposed new council. We have decided to recommend to our several churches that we join forces to overcome, as the Spirit gives us grace, the existing differences and to cooperate in such activities and in such a way that existing differences are not ignored or glossed over.' . . .

"With this in mind the constitution for the proposed Lutheran Council in the United States of America was drafted. This constitution makes participation in the Division of Theological Studies mandatory, while allowing each participating body to determine its measure of participation in all other work. Thus the life of the proposed council will center in a systematic and continuing doctrinal discussion among all Lutherans participating in the council.

"With this proposed Lutheran Council in the United States of America, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod faces another decisive step in its efforts to seek a unity among Lutherans that is pleasing to the Lord of the church."

[7] Cf. *Toward Fellowship*, 1969, p. 13. This document, which was distributed throughout the Synod by President Oliver Harms, states: "The same doctrinal requirements obtain for establishing merger as for establishing altar and pulpit fellowship. The practice of fellowship would be essentially the same under either arrangement. Either arrangement offers the same demands and the same latitude with respect to fellowship. If church bodies wish to form a church merger or some other type of association, then it is assumed they are prepared to make the necessary structural or organizational adjustments."

A statement accepted in substance by the district presidents of both the American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in 1969 states that a declaration of altar and pulpit fellowship will express itself in the following way:

"1. Pastors in good standing in each church body may be invited to preach from the pulpits of the other church body.
2. Congregations of church bodies in fellowship may hold joint worship services.
3. Members of the congregations of each church body who are in good standing in their own congregation and do not violate principles regulating communion practices in the host congregation shall be welcome as guests at the altar of congregations of the other church body. . . .
4. Members in good standing may transfer their membership from a congregation of one church body to a congregation of the other church body in conformity with the practices of the receiving congregation." *Convention Proceedings*, 1969, p. 97.

[8] 1971 Res. 3-26. This resolution restates the Synod's desire "to initiate and work toward fellowship with those Lutheran churches with whom it is not in altar and pulpit fellowship" and that it do so on this basis: "1) Multi-level discussion of the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions with those Lutheran churches with whom we are not in fellowship in order to seek agreement in doctrine and practice leading to a declaration of altar and pulpit fellowship . . ., 2) Declaration of altar and pulpit fellowship by a majority vote of the church delegates assembled in church convention . . ., 3) Continued negotiations to find the proper ensuing steps to implement additional forms of cooperative activity." *Convention Proceedings*, 1971, p. 139.

[9] LCMS Constitution, Article III, 1.

[10] Cf. 1981 Res. 3-01. This resolution states in part: "Whereas, both the ALC and LCMS recognize that doctrinal differences exist between the two church bodies; and Whereas, twelve years of doctrinal discussions between the ALC and LCMS, including four years of fellowship in protest, have neither resolved existing doctrinal differences, nor offered any basis for assuming that they will soon be resolved; and Whereas, the LCMS understands 'altar and pulpit fellowship' to be an official relationship between two church bodies based on their agreement in doctrine and practice; and Whereas, the doctrinal differences between the ALC and the LCMS have become increasingly pronounced during the past 12 years; therefore be it *Resolved*, That the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod with deep sorrow herewith declare that it is not in altar and pulpit fellowship with the American Lutheran Church." *Convention Proceedings*, 1981, p. 154.

[11] For an excellent summary statement of the doctrinal differences between the LCMS and the LCA/ALC, see "The Function of Doctrine and Theology in Light of the Unity of the Church," a report prepared in 1977 by official representatives from these three churches. This document is available from the Division of Theological Studies, 360 Park Avenue South, New York, N.Y. 10010.

> It is this concern which explains why Missouri is not a part of the efforts to form a new church, and why we are not considering the official sharing of the Eucharist with those who do not share our doctrinal confession. For official discussions have already demonstrated that we do not possess agreement in Biblical doctrine in such important areas as the authority and interpretation of Holy Scripture and the nature and basis of church fellowship.[12]

In other words, only disagreement in the doctrine of the Gospel is cause for division in Christendom, but when this disagreement in the confession of the faith exists, then God's Word itself forbids the affirmation of church fellowship.

What is the nature of the unity we in the LCMS seek? Dr. Martin Franzmann's answer to this question in 1957 is still appropriate today:

> We desire that men be united in a gladly resolute, radical, and total submission of faith to God as he has revealed himself in his Son Jesus Christ; for we can know and have the God of measureless condescension only in Christ, in the once-for-all historic act of his life, death, and resurrection. If we are to hear a word from God which does not annihilate us but gives us life in communion with him, that word must be the Word made flesh. This Word made flesh, this Son of God, in turn, is known to us only and can become ours only by the apostolic word of those who witness to him, those words which the living, potent, and creative presence of the Paraclete has made to be the divinely valid witness to Christ, the effectual loosing and binding word by which Christ and the opened heavens are gained or lost. We have Christ in this inerrantly loosing and binding apostolic word, or we do not have him at all. We seek unity, then, as we seek it under God and in Christ, in a full and common obedience to the Holy Scriptures. . . . Faith holds to the promise, the word of God, against reason, against experience, against feeling. This is what makes the question of the inspiration and the authority of Scripture so important and so crucial in the question of church unity; for "Scripture" and "Word of God" belong together, and it is our conviction that they cannot be too tightly bracketed. The statement, "The Bible is the Word of God," unquestioned for more than a millennium and a half of the church's history, is questioned on all hands today; a *significat* of some sort has in our days replaced the forthright *est* of earlier days here, as it has so widely in the case of the Sacrament.[13]

Franzmann did not hesitate to state 35 years ago that "it is this glad and full assent to Scripture as the Word of God that we 'Missourians' painfully miss in large areas of Christendom, including Lutheranism today. It constitutes a block to unity, nor merely formally . . . but also substantially."[14]

If this was an accurate assessment of the Lutheran scene in 1957, it is all the more true today.[15] Nevertheless, the LCMS continues to be committed to a confessional ecumenism, that is, it desires external unity among Lutherans, and indeed all Christians, based on agreement "in doctrine and in all its articles" (FC SD X, 31). There is nothing that we will not do, short of compromising the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to work for this goal.

[12] Ralph Bohlmann, "The LCMS and Lutheran Unity," *Lutheran Witness*, October 1982, pp. 33-34.

[13] Martin Franzmann, "The Nature of the Unity We Seek," *Concordia Theological Monthly*, Nov. 1957, pp. 801-803.

[14] *Ibid*, p. 804.

[15] Cf. *Studies in Lutheran Hermeneutics*, John Reumann, *et al*, eds., (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978).

### *A Difficulty with Repentance*

So. We've reached the old impasse,
our meeting thwarted by this
Thing again, this heaviness
between us
and still no rain.

Only sighs like distant wind
beneath the layers. Only pain's
umbilical connection
tugging
this ten-thousandth time.

And now the countermand—
the syrup voice from Eden
dripping welcome at the brim
again. Again.
Another
pilgrimage in vain before
we touch then? Before this mortared
wind erupts? Before the storm
at last is us?

**Lois Reiner**

### *Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep*

Sometimes, especially at night
I hear a frightful whisper, quiet,
one speaking of death.

Tonight you may die, it says.
Die. Think on what you've done this day.
Death will come fast, in your sleep.

Fast to your throat and breath.
I wish the voice away: Hold. Stay,
My fine threads of reason

Echo in my neck, outpaced
by this stranger. Did you come
in through the diamond-shaped window

On the stairs, hide in the wash stand,
awaiting my ascent? Did you now?
Did you come to steal my soul

This night floating as a tank
of newborn fishes
high over my own floating heart?

**Travis Du Priest**

# Music at the Crossroads

## Minimalism and the Avant-Garde

Keith Paulson-Thorp

When a stylistic anomaly, denounced by most of music's literati, suddenly becomes both a leading trend in music composition and economically profitable, one is obliged to take a careful look. In the case of minimalism, which has enjoyed a meteoric rise in popularity in recent years, scrutiny of the phenomenon reveals as much about music the social barometer as about music the developing art form. At the heart of the current discussion lie some crucial issues which must be addressed by both composers and the general public.

Minimalism began in the 1950s as a branch of experimental composition. The label "minimal" was borrowed from the visual arts and first applied to certain works by John Cage and his followers. For these composers, minimalism entailed brevity of both the discrete event and long-term structural content. The ultimate in this technique was Cage's famous *4'33"* in which the performer produces no sound whatsoever and the listener is left to construct the music from the available ambient sounds.

During the Sixties, composers sought to reinstate the sonic continuity of music without sacrificing economy of means and individual sounds became extended to extraordinary lengths. Composer LaMonte Young explored such sonic continua in order to focus attention on the acoustical properties of the sound and as a means for determining audience tolerance to aural stimuli. As interest in ethnic musics waxed and composers became interested in the possibility of a more universal music, drones, melic (melodic) repetitions, and additive rhythms entered the minimalists' vocabulary. Minimalism soon came to refer not to music of minimal sound but to music of minimal sonic development. It is this approach to music as a mosaic of repeated patterns, or as a progression of events which unfolds so gradually that every facet of the transformation is obvious, which has been so widely acclaimed. The style has been awarded a myriad of labels: pattern music, phase music, process music (the latter two referring to specific techniques within the style), and repetitive music; the umbrella term minimalism is the label most often applied.

Not only have composers come out of the woodwork to jump on the bandwagon of a music which requires little if any professional training (the style can easily be assimilated in much the same way that one may, without theoretical background, learn to imitate popular songs), but they have also managed to attract an impressive array of critical approval and public funding. The recent New Music America festival held on Chicago's Navy Pier attracted funding from city, state, and federal agencies. Most of the festival's concerts were broadcast nationally on radio. Fully two-thirds of the music produced at the festival fell within the minimalist camp.

### Cashing In on Increasing Popularity

The promoters of New Music America also touted the products offered by the New Music Distribution Service, an agency which features the records of dozens of small independent record companies, many of which exist exclusively for the promulgation of music by minimalist composers. It is not only the profusion of these small labels which is significant, however, for the larger companies are also attempting to cash in on minimalism's growing popularity. Philip Glass, one of the high priests of minimalism has, after years of promoting his music on small private labels, contracted with Columbia records for the release of many of his works under the title "Glassworks." Seldom has an artistic style, after years of germination, so quickly found such ubiquitous interest in both artistic communities and public institutions.

Not only do the new minimalists differ from their experimental predecessors in the matter of sonic results, they seem to differ also in basic aesthetic motives. While Cage and his followers were posing questions about the essential properties of music as an activity, the new minimalism reflects a music culture which, failing to deal with the problems, imagined or real, of new music (or at least failing to propose or transmit answers to the public), wishes to retreat to a more secure musical pos-

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***Minimalism perfectly matches the mood of the contemporary era: it is a music that claims to be new yet challenges none of the surface qualities of music to which we so tenaciously hold.***

ture. For the earlier minimalists, the narrow and romanticized notions which characterized music in the first half of this century represented the intellectual stagnation of an increasingly technological society, and were open to the most rigorous scrutiny.

New definitions and applications were required if music was to remain a vital artistic force, one which might challenge the listener as a thinking being as well as entertain him. The experimentalists were not necessarily telling us that everything *is* music by including blatantly non-traditional elements in their works (an interpretation which is as misleading as it is popular) but rather that everything *can be* music, depending on the willingness and abilities of the listener to experience it as such. Music may thus be useful in compelling listeners toward self-evaluation and heightened awareness as well as toward a musical processing which is literally an activity, i.e., something which people do rather than which is done to them. If the earlier minimalists were seeking to disorient a self-satisfied audience, the new minimalists seem to be striving toward a music whose qualities will guarantee its acceptance by that same complacent audience, a music which makes few, if any, intellectual demands on the listener.

## Control of Informational Redundancies

Generally, aesthetic arguments in music must eventually be reduced to an evaluation of the flow, consistency, and opposition between informational units in the artistic experience. The critical factor here is the control of informational redundancies. By "redundancies" is meant the limited repertoire of elements, such as the tones of a diatonic scale, which by their constant disposition and realignment create a sense of lower level formal cohesion. The balance between these self-reinforcing redundancies and information which is laden with unique and potentially meaningful characteristics, i.e., information which challenges our existing interpretations, is crucial. An excess of the former creates boredom by offering nothing of consequence once an initial understanding of the state of the music has been achieved, while an excess of the latter exhausts the listener's capacity to construct a hierarchical reduction of the music and leaves him with a sense that the music is so highly charged with salient information as to be impossible to organize, that the music is thus ill-structured.

In many respects, the new minimalism may be understood as a reaction against serialism, a music in which semantically important information tends to occur in doses too heavy to be handled by even a well-trained listener. The lack of perceivable redundancies inhibits the sense of stability against which more significant events might operate. In most minimal music, as the designation would imply, the flow of significant information, that which challenges or redefines the existing interpretation of the music, is so slow that there is simply not enough to keep the listener engaged in the musical process. For some composers this is a deliberately calculated factor. Steve Reich has gone so far as to compare the measured musical processes in his compositions with the flow of sands through an hourglass. We are expected to find exhilarating an activity which once set into motion simply runs its course; we are thus observers and not participants in the music.

Is it this control, this fascination with the miniscule aspects of a process, which fascinates the public? I think not. Several of Reich's works which are founded on this concept have found little favor at large. During one performance of Reich's *Pendulum Music,* in which a microphone is suspended pendulum-like above a stage and then swung freely to devour its own feedback, virtually the entire audience fled the hall and the overpowering decibel level. His tape pieces, most of which are based on speech patterns recycled and manipulated on tape loops, have also been given little attention.

What these works lack, but what is abundantly present in Reich's more popular compositions, is first a sense of orientation toward pitch as a prime structural element, and second, a sense that those pitches are being employed in a traditional *tonal* manner. Most listeners seem to be more enchanted by the idea that a purportedly "new" music can make such unremitting use of tonality than by any musical or intellectual "processes" a composer may be trying to stimulate. It was just this property of tonality, for example, which was praised by Leonard Bernstein during his 1973 Norton lectures at Harvard, later published in the book *The Unanswered Question.*

The rise in popularity of minimal music has coincided with an increasingly conservative social and political swing in recent years. Just as society has retreated from the progressive social accomplishments of our civilization, so musically they seem to prefer the "muzak" level of experience, a museum-like culture in which well-known works are continually recycled, where the familiar is heard but not listened to. At the same time the appearance of championing progress must be continued. Minimalism appears to be the panacea: a music which claims to be new yet challenges none of the surface qualities of music to which we so tenaciously hold.

In fact, the relation to tradition in minimalism is tenuous at best. Tonality and consonance in music have never been as static as they have become in this new repertoire; they have always served as a platform from which to launch movement, principally harmonic modu-

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lation. Strength of movement and the opposition of states resulting from that movement is inherent in Western music yet gets short shrift in most minimal music. Here the listener is enveloped in the unflagging consonance and tonal reinforcement. Many listeners have described an experience of entering an almost trance-like state where the music washes over them. This strongly visceral reaction, this musical drug, and not the working-through of musical ideas, is the attraction. The short-term features of the music have obscured the conception of the whole.

## Gaining Acceptance in Europe First

Minimalism's popularity in the United States was preceded by its acceptance in Europe. It is so with most musical trends. Perhaps it is part of the American inferiority complex that requires European acceptance as a prerequisite to acceptance here. The differences in popular attitudes toward the arts between the two continents are instructive. In Europe, music is viewed as an indispensible part of the shared culture, as part of the national identity. In America it tends to be viewed as an expendable luxury. Both continents have seen a growth in government subsidization of the arts, but while Europeans seem to see this as a necessary means of preserving and enhancing the arts, Americans are more likely to see subsidies as handouts, perhaps as a sign of general prosperity or as a means of proving that "we have culture too."

Americans are, as arts consumers, slower to explore the rich diversity of contemporary music and generally become enamored of one trend, or more appropriately "fad," at a time. In the Fifties, that trend was Neo-Classicism, in the Sixties dodecaphonism (the twelve-tone technique), and in the Seventies a love of the acoustically bizarre, especially the use of extended performance techniques such as singing into flutes. The new fad is minimalism. Europeans, on the other hand, seem to be able to explore a more comprehensive array of compositional styles. Though minimal works have been quite successful at finding European audiences, they are shown no preferential treatment over such musics as the dense textural studies of the Dutch or the numerological works of Danish composers (all of which seem to be relatively unknown in this country) or the sonic explorations of the Polish and Scandinavian schools.

The limited acceptance of new music in the United States at mid-century forced the majority of progressive composers into the shelter of university teaching. The reticence of professional organizations, symphony orchestras, opera companies, etc. to risk large sums of money on experimental ventures was in sharp contrast to the need on the part of educational institutions to project a progressive and competitive image. With a seemingly endless supply of eager students and taxpayers' money with which to mount festivals, the state university became the primary artistic forum. In time, the more progressive trends found broader acceptance and became linked in the minds of most listeners with the institutions which had first given them exposure. Thus, there arose the common notion that modern music was purely "academic" in conception, meant to appeal to the intellect's eye rather than to the ear, and beyond the grasp of the average concertgoer. This link was reinforced in the Sixties as audiences became bombarded with the stringency of serial techniques.

Minimalism is somewhat unique among recent styles in that it has constructed few ties to the academic subculture, and has only recently attracted attention in most university settings. It was a grassroots type of music and developed in establishments such as New York's "The Kitchen." The obvious lack of intellectual pretense in minimal music has been a major impetus in endearing it to a large public. Minimalism attempts to be a "peoples'" music rather than an "artistic" music and appeals to those masses of people in whom "art"

***Development and maturity in the minimalist style will come only as composers continue to reevaluate their craft and as they assimilate themselves into the mainstream of contemporary musical thought.***

seems to instill a phobic reaction. Composers are left in the unenviable position of having to deal with a music which contradicts some basic tenets of their craft and with a public whose opinions will determine the composer's professional survival, and whose fascination with minimalism cannot be ignored.

While many composers seem to be attracted to minimalism because of its naive simplicity, the recent New Music America festival evidenced a genuine concern on the part of some composers for the aesthetic problems of the style. Three branches of minimalist activity were represented at the festival. The first group consists of the purists, the old guard minimalists who continue to defend the aesthetic validity of the style and who are enjoying the considerable financial advantages which have come with increased popularity.

## Carrying Things to Musical Extremes

The second group tends to be younger and wants to draw sharp public reaction (which can, after all, be far more valuable in achieving notoriety than public acceptance) by carrying individual parameters of their music to extremes. These composers are largely responsible for the fusion of minimalism and rock known as "New Wave." The shock value of excessive length or deafeningly high decibel levels obviates any purely musical considerations one may draw from this music. These composers usually achieve their goal and manage to usurp the majority of coverage in the press, as evidenced in the elaborate controversy over the music of Glenn Branca, the current darling of the New York scene.

While the first two groups of composers have attained the greatest renown, the third group of composers may ultimately decide the importance of minimalism in the long run. These composers are reconciling minimalism with the exigencies of the Western tradition. Just as the finer dodecaphonic composers realized that the decrease in pitch stability in their music required a comparable increase in the stability of complementary parameters, these composers are compensating for the static pitch content of the minimal style by adjusting textures, timbres, and the metric dynamics. Accompanying this is an abbreviation in length of compositions from the norm of twenty to forty minutes found in the music of the first two groups of composers to a more reasonable norm of eight to ten minutes. Within this reduced framework, the listener is better able to store and interpret the activities and proportions of the music without capitulating to either unreasonable processing demands or boredom.

Northwestern University's Peter Gena, one of the coordinators of the New Music America festival, produced some music in which the limited melodic palette is offset by constant fluctuation in chord voicings and metric accent. In Gena's *S-13, S-14* each phrase of the music is repeated twice, enough to allow for stability and easy recognition of ideas, but not so much as to impede the flow of new material by dwelling on one idea too long.

The metric incisiveness of the work is one of its more arresting qualities. While the music of minimal composers has long preserved rhythmic directness and a subtle metric regularity, features which endeared it to the dance world long before musicians in general were taking note, recent works have intensified the use of polyrhythms and metric irregularities. The metric ambiguity of much avant-garde music, created less by composers than by performers who are ill-equipped to interpret non-metricized parts, had alienated many listeners. Long-term rhythmic momentum frequently seemed to be sacrificed for the sake of the rhythmic nuance of individual gestures. Many minimalists are attempting to create a more reasonable balance between rhythm and other parameters of their music.

The modifications in style effected by these composers cannot help but expand minimalism's following even further. Many composers who are best known for their longer and more meditative compositions have shown an interest in these modifications. Philip Glass, for example, has recently produced some works of very brief duration with a tremendous rhythmic vigor. His *Modern Love Waltz,* available on C.R.I. records, is a perfect example.

Minimalism is currently being drawn out of its musical isolation and into the broader arena of compositional interest. This is being achieved both by the aesthetic conscience of many minimal composers and by the necessity created by its public prominence. If the style is to continue to develop, it cannot afford to rely on its public image as the new tonality or an anti-scholastic music, an image which is fragile in its superficiality. Development and maturity in the style will come only as composers continue to reevaluate their craft and as they assimilate themselves into the mainstream of contemporary thought.

Minimalism is presently being enriched by the infusion of traditional aesthetic values and is, at the same time, being incorporated into the music of composers who do not generally write in the minimalist style. As the experimental tradition begins to merge with the centuries-old continuity of Western art, we may be able to correct many misconceptions, both positive and negative, not only about this new music, but also about musics of the past which are widely accepted but seldom understood.

# A Return to Basic Black

## The MOMA Show of Intaglio Prints

**William Olmsted**

Julius Meier-Graefe said it in 1908: "The whole history of painting shows a gradual development of surface, a gradual disappearance of contour." Subject to the appropriate qualifications, this remains one of the more useful truisms of art history. Two recent shows seemed in their rather different ways to confirm the aptness of Meier-Graefe's dictum. The exhibit of seventeenth-century French paintings at Chicago's Art Institute had the sort of vastness which is the essayist's despair. A few remarks about this exhibit, however, can serve as an introduction to the tidier subject of the Valparaiso University show of prints from New York's Museum of Modern Art.

Despite a superabundance of second-rate canvases, the Chicago show included three superb paintings by Claude Lorrain and a few mythological and religious scenes by Nicolas Poussin. I was especially impressed by one of Poussin's finer versions of "The Rape of the Sabine Women." The canvas was crammed with struggling women and soldiers, but they were locked in poses which had the absolute stillness and finality of classical sculpture. The violence of the scene was strangely restful, an effect due for the most part to the unexcelled firmness of Poussin's line. Paradoxically enough, these statuesque Sabines have greater energy and greater repose than the "maidens loth" on Keats's urn.

The horrifying calm of Poussin's canvas was faintly disrupted by an old woman in the foreground, kneeling in supplication. As I looked at this pathetic figure I realized that Delacroix, two centuries later, had borrowed her for "The Massacre at Chios." Although Delacroix's quotation is not exact, this particular continuity between the two artists indicated the truth in Meier-Graefe's claim.

Poussin's scene is architecturally framed and bathed in uniform light. Suffering and pathos are made intelligible by a sculptural rendering which sets disaster into the context of some abiding, eternal wisdom. Everything is solid, clear, frozen—the enigma of pain now fully comprehended by the light of reason. Such paintings call for allegorical explanation; in Delacroix's work, however, we never penetrate the surface of the mystery. Fear, grief, horror, and lassitude are frontally exposed, enhanced rather than dissipated by vague shadows and an infinitely receding background. Linear perspective is flaunted and the Poussinesque woman, once a graceful suppliant, is now a stunned and twisted victim of absurd violence. Whereas Poussin's line and contour summon us to rational contemplation, Delacroix's color and surface forbid such composure. Baudelaire once tried to convey the emotional force in Delacroix's agitated surfaces by remarking that the colors seemed to think for themselves; but this observation is perhaps too abstract. In "The Massacre at Chios" the sanguine reds and bruised blues do appear to live independently of the shapes they color; yet their "thoughts" remain traumatizing and sorrowful.

From our perspective the transition from Poussin to Delacroix signals the coming subordination of draftsmanship to coloring. More than anything else, this hegemony of color—from the waterlilies of Monet to the drip paintings of Jackson Pollock—distinguishes our own era from the past. Yet the central importance of color in modern art was implicitly contested by the Valparaiso show, almost as if the Museum of Modern Art had decreed a return to the austerities of the basic black line. "About Line" was devoted to intaglio prints of etchings and drypoints by modern masters (Klee, Braque, Picasso) and rising stars (Jim Dine, Sol LeWitt, Jim Nutt). The MOMA organizers billed the show as a demonstration of the rediscovered potentialities of line. By offering a variety of styles, from cubism to pop, the show ably testified to the versatility of line; nevertheless, I felt there was something anachronistic in such massive insistence on the continuing importance of line.

Not that masterpieces were lacking; on the contrary, some of the prints could stand alongside the etchings of Rembrandt, Goya, and Manet. "The Death of Orpheus," illustrating a story from Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* was a fine example of Picasso's astonishing facility. All the available space was used, but the verve and confidence of Picasso's line never faltered. The swirling energy of this 1930 etching was counterpointed by a much simpler work done in the following year. "Detail of the body of a woman" was an economical tour de

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force using only three lines to achieve a very graceful image of waist, hip, buttocks and thighs.

An equally graceful but also more seductive and wittier version of feminine beauty was created by Henri Matisse's "Reclining Nude with Goldfish Bowl" (1929). Similiar ladies and goldfish often occur in Matisse's oils, where the brilliant tones of unmixed color produce an atmosphere of nearly unbearable exoticism. But in the monochromatic world of this etching Matisse expressed his joy with exceptional directness. This print underlined the fact that superb drawing is an integral part of Matisse's work in oils.

A more surprising instance of a successful transition from painting to etching was provided by Nicolas de Stael's "Composition" (1954). De Stael is best known for paintings (like "The Roofs of Paris") whose slabs of color bring scenic art into the realm of abstract expressionism. "Composition" lacked the mystical fervor conjured by De Stael's thick layers of paint, yet the print's easy evocation of ships and rigging was a powerful inducement to maritime reveries.

Further evidence that modern artists could prosper without the aid of color came from a number of prints which, if not quite in the masterclass, were perfectly satisfying. I was intrigued by the confessional spontaneity of the self-portraits by Jim Dine (good-humored and shrewd) and Max Beckmann (cruel and arrogant). The latter's drypoint of "Bathing Women" was a refreshingly benign departure from his usual bitterness. Edward Hopper's "The Railroad," done in 1922, seemed to prophesy the hobo gloom of the coming Depression. Done in the same year, Childe Hassam's "House on Main Street, Southampton" cheerfully alchemized its banal subject into a light and airy approximation of everybody's favorite house.

These successes, however, must be balanced against the botches. Chagall's use of unadorned line in "Lovers by the River" was disastrous. His primitive draftsmanship, minus the primary colors which made kindred scenes in his oils so touching, produced a couple of wretchedly stiff lovers. Klee, one of the century's greatest colorists, was completely bogged down in the static, fussy lines of "Garden of Passion"—a study in anxiety rather than passion. A Kandinsky drypoint, plate XI from "Little Worlds," also suffered from the absence of color. The squiggly shapes looked like pedantic drawings in a biologist's notebook; deprived of the acrid, inhumanly tinted spots and bands they possess in Kandinsky's paintings, these microscopic creatures seemed harmlessly defunct. Worst of all, perhaps, was Pollock's "Untitled 2" (1944). No one would suspect, having seen this total nullity, that the artist was one of the founders of Action Painting, the creator of such huge and dazzling works as "White Light." Although the show's organizers were concerned to give some exposure to lesser known works, they would have done better to have chosen a different Pollock etching.

If the prints in "About Line" were the sole basis for judgment, we might well suppose that artists like Hopper and Hassam are superior to Klee and Kandinsky. Because this supposition would be false on almost every count, the show is guilty—however unwittingly—of concealing and distorting the real values of modernism. For better or worse, these values reside in the liberation of color and line from the tyranny of objective representation. No doubt that etching and drypoint remained congenial for some artists, notably those who—from habit or prudence—clung to a representational rather than abstract style. Equally certain that some artists, e.g., Chagall, simply failed to respect the constraints imposed by the black and white medium of the print. Yet the selection of prints suggested that abstraction could not prosper in this medium. There is a small truth in this suggestion, insofar as our era is the history of *paintings* whose colors "think for themselves." Take away this color and you remove a great deal of what is vital in modern art—be it Mondrian's boogie-woogie or De Kooning's ferocious ladies or Rothko's search for the absolute.

In its effort to dramatize the importance of line the show elected to represent a particular genre as though it existed in utter independence from the rest of modern art. But the uniformity of the show reflected the tidy categories of art historians and museum curators rather than the facts of history. Etching and drypoint are perhaps too neglected by modern artists, yet good drawing is still flourishing—especially on the part of artists whose work resists arbitrary classification. Saul Steinberg, Claes Oldenburg, Philip Guston, Lester Johnson, and even Ben Shahn could have told us a great deal "about line" and its most distinctive contributions to the art of our time. Their exclusion was a regrettable consequence of fanatical emphasis on *one* use of line, as well as a result of the show's predisposition toward representational and apolitical artists. Its peculiar biases aside, however, "About Line" did not fail in its essential task of bringing to the hinterlands some visionary specimens of the modern temper.

# Television

## The Play of the Law

### *The People's Court* May Tell Us of Something Amiss in the Legal System

**James Combs**

When I was a kid growing up in a rural area of the Southern mountains, my friends and I discovered a novel form of local entertainment. Too young for girls, cars, and bootleg hooch, and mystified by what went on at tent revivals, we discovered something fascinating that went on in the county courthouse: the spectacle of local courtroom justice.

We would sit quietly in the back of what seemed a cavernous hearing room and marvel and puzzle over the proceedings. We would marvel over the messes people would get themselves into, and puzzle over the glacial pace, ponderous language, and procedural tangles that characterized the proceedings. I remember how much I learned (I was ten or so) from a "breach of promise" case, in which an unmarried and thoroughly pregnant young woman was suing a slick-looking lounge lizard for child support. The high point came when they read his love letters to her in court. After that, my sex education was complete. Anyway, I haunted those local courts, and can remember how fascinating it was to see the common rubble of experience at issue, everything from shotgun murders to bitchy small claims over the ownership of a cow or the definition of a land boundary.

**_The People's Court_ really is a people's court, showing one or two small claims cases per show.**

With my long background in the law, I can therefore easily understand the popular fascination with the judicial process. Practically every stage, or aspect, of the American judicial system has been dramatized in popular culture, from criminal detection to detention. Television shows have hit just about every possible small judicial role, including that of coroner. But perhaps the bulk of TV's shows in this regard have dealt with the courtroom itself. The courtroom proceeding (trial, preliminary hearing, inquest, whatever) is, after all, a nice setting for an enclosed drama, within the "frame" of the law and courtroom rules, and involving an identifiable human conflict and usually a mystery. Such is the stuff of popular drama, the judicial stage on which television producers and writers can eternally enact new stories in the august and timeless setting of the courtroom. And we can be eternally interested in what kinds of awful conflicts find their way into court, and eternally reassured that justice is done.

Since the courtroom is for us an identifiable, real-life setting, TV has been tempted to draw from that. TV news has long sought to gain access to trials, televising them in their entirety or using clips for the news show. Such fare is often great entertainment, especially with a lurid crime. What could be more chilling than to see a real-live mass murderer on the stand not only confess, but also ask to be executed so he won't do it again? Think what television could have done if it had had access to some of the great trials—Scopes, Leopold-Loeb, Lindbergh, the Rosenbergs. TV producers have already gone so far as to make docu-dramas about the fictional trials of General Custer and Lee Oswald, entertaining us by recreating the mysteries of the Little Big Horn and Dealey Plaza.

And then there was *Divorce Court.* Remembered by TV buffs as perhaps the most camp of all of ABC's early experiments with television programming (it also made Jim McKay known nationwide), *Divorce Court* mingled fact and fiction, reality and drama. The lawyers were really lawyers, the judge a real judge. The shows were allegedly based on actual cases, but the actors were actors, following the TV script. Breaks in the action were timed for bogus "conferences at the bench" to allow us to cut away for commercials. Yet the use of people from the reality of the courtroom gave the show a strange authenticity.

And now there is *The People's Court.* Here TV doesn't just intrude in a courtroom for TV news footage; nor does it merely try to intermingle the real and the fictional. Rather the symbiosis is complete: *The People's Court* is an honest-to-god people's court, showing one or two genuine, and carefully selected, small claims cases per show. These cases are adjudicated by one Judge Joseph A. Wapner, a retired jurist who presides over this citadel of justice. Wapner is Central Casting's image of a judge: handsome, silver-haired, with a solemn mien, incisive mind, and dry wit. More, he affects the moral tone we expect from the bench, lecturing litigants about things they have done, and shouldn't do (e.g., smoking). Yet he has a kind of sad tolerance of human cussedness as it manifests itself in the hedonistic lifestyle of southern California. Judge Wapner appears to understand human lust and greed, and he dispenses justice without the strictures of the puritan conscience. In Wapner's court, one gets what one deserves without having to feel too bad about it.

One of the reasons for this is that the show takes the bite out of the

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**We may all grant the power, if not the taste, of television. But let us remember that television, perhaps more than any other popular medium, is a democratic art.**

conflicts. The conflicts are real, but they are obviously selected for audience interest. The cases are often bizarre or amusing, the litigants often goodlooking and articulate. The litigants argue their own cases, and agree (as in most small claims courts) not to appeal the case to any other legal forum. As in other similar California courts, the lawsuits are limited to a maximum claim of $1500. Yet the "show trial" of *The People's Court* has an interesting "no fault" aspect: nobody loses any money. Justice is done by the producers of the show paying the damages to the winner, and even giving a $25 consolation prize to the loser! TV justice, like that of the game show, means that everyone gets something, taking the sting out of losing.

And of course, the litigants gain the ultimate gratification in our culture of fame, becoming famous for their brief Warholian fifteen minutes. It is astonishing how these amateur actors become immersed in their roles, with tears of anguish, emotional pleas for justice and mercy, eloquent defenses of their actions, pleasurable smirks of triumph when Wapner rules for them, and sad dejection when he rules against them. But they can leave *The People's Court* without chronic remorse, since after all their losses were mitigated, and their moment of fame established: losing is not a disgrace, only one of the vagaries of show biz.

*The People's Court* is of interest to the student of television for a wide variety of reasons. For openers, it is pure television, demonstrating that medium's uncanny ability to take any "reality" (in this case, the institution of the small claims court), and remake it to the requirements of television. Most stuff that comes before small claims courts in the mundane world of local justice is dull—bitter and dreary little fights over back rent, loose dogs, and the like. Television has the dramatic capacity to take any such reality and transform and condense it into something gripping and even pretty. Television has the power to take the dreariest of all judicial forums and make it into something entertaining and educational. Clearly a show like *The People's Court* is misleading: other small claims courts don't operate with the same neat and gripping script. But no institution is sacred to TV, and if it is the case that this show lessens the dignity of the judicial system, or makes a mockery of justice, we may be sure that it causes the producers and distributors of the show no anguish.

We may all grant the power, if not the taste, of television. But let us remember that TV, perhaps more than any other popular medium, is a democratic art, dependent for survival and profit on its ability to entertain mass audiences. Television is perhaps the most transitory of mediums, sensitive to popular tastes, moods, and fantasies. Some aspects of the popular mind are relatively enduring, others more responsive to the shifting tides of national mood. So certain themes that endure as popular values—family life, romantic love, the corruption of power and wealth—recur in television programming. Other themes are best read as specific to a particular time, and thus to the mood of the public at that time. The 1970s produced TV themes that emerged from contemporary public concerns: nostalgia for a simpler life, the comic possibilities of bigotry, racism, and war, the fun and evil of power. Although such cultural and temporal "readings" are dangerous and imperfect, nevertheless the student of popular communication cannot resist them. What does *The People's Court* tell us about ourselves today? Why is it popular?

To answer such questions adequately would require extensive audience studies, but these are difficult and expensive to do. Here we are stuck with the more intuitive method of gleaning the appeal of a program by reflection. *The People's Court,* I contend, has popular appeal not merely because it speaks to our feelings of being ripped off in everyday life, feelings which lead us to want to see simple justice done in some kind of entertainment forum. And there is also something deeper involved than our commitment to litigation. I suspect the appeal of *The People's Court* is rooted in the Anglo-Saxon tradition of law.

**Television is often accused of being "escapist." But we must recall that we desire to escape only because some aspect of our lives is unbearable or unfulfilling.**

For most people the American judicial system is remote, forbidding, guarded over by a clique of professionals who command the law through miracle, mystery, and authority. We are excluded from the mysteries of the temple by the priesthood. The law is inhuman, threatening, puzzling to us. *The People's Court* humanizes it, puts it in the amusing and "real" context of our lives, takes it out of the hands of lawyers.

This exploitative little program works because it reminds us of the tradition of bench law, the kind of law established by the Norman kings: courts in equity that decided the petty issues that concern us ordinary folk. *The People's Court* is a TV version of the circuit-riding judge who traveled around and dispensed justice. When peasants disputed over a cow, they had recourse to the local institutions of the king's law—petit juries, justices of the peace, sheriffs, judges. But in the highly bureaucratized and professionalized legal system of today, that tradition seems lost for most people. Lost also is the sense that ordinary justice is done. *The People's Court* comes then to be a place, an electronic court in equity, that dispenses justice. The judge is human, fair, and lettered in understandable law; the people argue their own cases; the bench decides (although beforehand the master of ceremonies polls the audience for its verdict, unbeknownst to the judge, who then renders his decision); justice is done.

If there is anything to my speculation, then students of the law should reflect upon the significance of TV justice. It seems to be the case that people see *The People's Court* as filling a vacuum in the judicial system; this little program apparently fulfills a mass psychic need that the system does not. People do seem to feel that in the ripoffs and petty wrongs of everyday life no one in the real judicial system cares or can help them, and so they turn to the vicarious satisfaction of a contrived electronic justice.

Television is often accused of being "escapist." But we must recall that we desire to escape only because some aspect of our lives is unbearable or unfulfilling. Escape makes it bearable or fulfilling. Perhaps *The People's Court,* in some dim way, lets us escape to a world of simple justice, in which the law and the court work for us, dispensing everyday equity. We seek entertainment for many reasons, not the least of which is to play with the world as we wish it would be. If *The People's Court* is what we wish the judicial system to be, then perhaps that system isn't doing something it should, namely, making ordinary people feel as if justice is done, or could be done, in the common struggles of their individual lives.

### *The Dream*

Before this day turned to fire
singeing the willows
hissing through the screen
coolness stayed on my pillow
still damp from the dream

where nightwind whipped lassos 'round
sentinel pine and
whistled down silver
from indigo sky as we
sliced through the river

tugging at tails of gold dust she
chipped for a beacon
from stars while the moon
waiting cooly under blue glass
waved us along down

watery stairs that plunged without
pattern past phosphorous
hands and shimmering
fingers tatting moss shrouds for forms
slimy, slithering

swinging black gates soundlessly
open, soundlessly
close on a kingdom
of ice that eerily rose
through something one

hears while clawing towards orange and
the breath on your face
starts melting the dream
and a dirge shrieks you upright:
a sheet-shredding scream.

**Lois Reiner**

# Theatre

**Six years later, *A Chorus Line*'s thrilling moments and splendid sequences remain remarkably fresh.**

## Back to the Line

### Returning to *A Chorus Line* Returns Us to The Mood of the 1970s

**John Steven Paul**

*A Chorus Line* opened on July 25, 1975 at New York's Sam S. Shubert theatre and is now the longest running show in the history of that venerable playhouse, which opened in 1913. By now, thousands of audiences have applauded the musical's compelling characters, its clever music, and, most of all, its cornucopia of dance. *A Chorus Line's* collaborators began with the simple story of sixteen dancers auditioning for eight chorus parts in a Broadway show and achieved a nearly perfect integration of content and form. *A Chorus Line* is a tribute to performance, performers, and performing performed by performers. Such conceptual wholeness is rare.

I first saw *A Chorus Line* in the summer of 1976. That was in Chicago's Shubert where the show had come on its first national tour. More than six years later, its thrilling moments and splendid sequences remain remarkably fresh and, if memory serves, unchanged. There is still, for example, the beguilingly austere production design, bare stage, lots of lights, and a wall of mirrors. That's it; that, and an imaginary line drawn across the stage floor.

Designer Robin Wagner understood that *A Chorus Line* is not about scenery but about performers and their relationship to an empty stage. Wagner's black velour drapes and borders create an inky, cavernous environment. At first, the dancers appear suspended in limbo. Theoni V. Aldridge has costumed them in warm-up gear just distinctive enough to raise a muted protest of individual identity. Michael Bennett, director and choreographer, has arrayed them in successive tableaux reminiscent of pastel figures painted on black velvet. The sixteen-foot mirrors are actually single sides of a series of three-sided units: another side is black, the third glistening white and gold. This glittery side appears only once as if to underscore the irony of a Broadway show sans Broadway glitz.

In the mid-Seventies, it seemed that Bennett, his designers, and his backers were taking a big gamble, betting that Broadway audiences would embrace a production stripped of most of the big show accoutrements. Not only was there a dearth of spectacular scenic display, there was also no big star—hardly even a recognizable name in the cast. While there was a series of interesting characters, there was hardly any plot. What *A Chorus Line's* patrons appeared to have gotten was a rather flimsy dramatic framework supporting a glorious dance concert.

*A Chorus Line* is indeed dance. Dance of all kinds: ballet, modern, jazz, tap, and soft-shoe; male dancers and female dancers in ensembles and solos. Some of the dances are explicitly communicative; others are abstractly beautiful; all are full of grace and charm. And, at the end of the show, comes a kick-line, that marvelous Broadway cliché which inevitably draws applause.

*A Chorus Line*'s chief contribution to the American musical theatre is its unabashed re-centralization of the song and dance on the Broadway stage after an extended period when the play was the thing. Largely unburdened by scenic invention and dramatic convention, the performers are able to impress the audience directly. All this—the honesty, the freshness, the freedom, the grace—is true, and yet upon re-viewing *A Chorus Line* it was the play's statement about its times that struck me as the most penetrating aspect of the experience.

The source of *A Chorus Line*'s dramatic energy is the tension between two life-orientations. Each of the dancers has trained for a good portion of his life. Through solitary personal discipline and commitment each has developed skills which are finally a product of his own unique combination of physique, natural coordination, personality, and degree of determination. To have achieved the level of excellence necessary to dance in a Broadway show is to have earned the right to think of oneself as, in the words of one of *Chorus Line's* lyrics, "a singular sensation." But these hopefuls are auditioning for the opportunity, six days a week and twice on Wednesdays and Saturdays, to buy that singularity in the uniformity and regularity of a chorus line. This tension is replayed repeatedly throughout a show whose title is "A Chorus Line," but whose big production number is entitled "ONE."

Like many other American dramatists, James Kirkwood and Nicholas Dante* have brought a diverse collection of individuals into a catalytic situation and subjected them to a process that will induce them to

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*It's particularly difficult to think in terms of discrete contributions by individuals to *A Chorus Line*, a show which is so obviously a result of artistic collaboration by its choreographers, director, designers, writers, composers, and lyricist. Kirkwood and Dante, nevertheless, are credited in the program with having written the book.

**Thus arises the paradox at the heart of *A Chorus Line*. How do individuals with keen senses of self conform themselves to the rigidly regulated discipline of a group?**

reveal their deepest selves. In this case, the authors have discarded the crafty expositional devices of conventional realistic drama in favor of direct questions: each dancer will be required, as part of his audition, to talk in some depth about himself. Here then are men, women, blacks, Hispanics, and whites; straights and gays; a husband and wife; and a father with two children at home. They cover the relatively narrow age spectrum typical of performing artists, from the late teens to the late thirties, when a career is nearly at an end. Among the sixteen are introverts and extroverts, teeth-gritting concentraters and energy-efficient professionals, whiz kids and veterans, who all have two things in common. Their dancing talent is indisputably top notch and they desperately want this job.

At first, the auditioners are discomfited by the very idea of having to answer such superficially harmless but potentially painful questions as "Why did you become a dancer?" or "Why do you want this job?" Whatever else they have been expected to put on the line, they have never been asked to publicly reconstruct their identities. It is not long, however, before their instincts to please Zack, the casting director, triumph over their fears of self-exposure, and slowly, sometimes torturously, they begin to talk about themselves. The process of individuation begins and the cast divides itself into characters.

In song and story, the characters trace the formation of their identities to their adolescent years. The song "Hello Twelve, Hello Thirteen, Hello Love" is a compendious conglomeration of the joys, the agonies, the yearnings, the doubts, and the numberless other feelings that complicate the time of life during which individual identity emerges. The stories, which might have been culled from high school diaries, review the forces that, in harmony or conflict, formed unique selves. Several of the stories focus on the various facts of life at home: Mom hated Dad, or vice versa; or Dad wasn't satisfied with Mom; or Dad wasn't satisfied with me because I hated sports, and so on. Other stories relate to life at school. One particularly amusing story recalls the experiences of a Puerto Rican girl named Morales who found her improvisational acting class at the High School for the Performing Arts in Manhattan to be particularly frustrating because she could feel "Nothing" (one of the show's most delightful songs). Some story-tellers recall their fantasies about movie stars ("If George Hamilton could be a movie star, then I could be a movie star!") or ballerinas; others their experiences in dance classes or their first performances. Credit the narrators with the ability to give their stories the multidimensional richness of cinematic flashbacks in which we see environment and experience actively forming character.

As with any normal red-blooded adolescents, these sixteen are obsessed with the development of their sexual selves. "Hello Twelve . . ." is dotted with mildly embarrassing but perfectly honest, innocent, and recognizable references to developing sexual awareness. For these kids, every lurch toward sexual enlightenment was accompanied by some intensely memorable bit of ecstasy or anguish.

Perhaps it is not surprising either that these people who as dancers would literally watch themselves grow up in the mirror would be intensely interested in their physical development: that aspect of self to be presented to audiences, whoever and wherever they might be. One of the girls waited patiently if anxiously throughout her adolescence for her breasts to develop. They never did. When she realized that her flatness was holding back her career as a show girl, she went out and bought herself a fancy pair, as the song says, of "Tits and Ass" from a surgical "wizard on Park and 73rd." The perception of anatomy as commodity may seem crass to some, hilarious to others, but for a dancer such a perception is a construct of identity.

Though each of the auditioners is unique by virtue of his environment and experience, all sixteen share a deep sensitivity to the world they inhabit and a highly developed consciousness of themselves as individuals. Each reveals that, during the period of identity formation, he felt somehow different, peculiar, or at odds with his immediate circumstances. And it is because they know themselves so well that by the end of the audition we know them so well.

We, like the director, recognize them now as individuals whose need to dance is inextricably linked to their individual identities.

Thus arises the paradox at the heart of *A Chorus Line*. How do individuals with such keen senses of self conform themselves to the rigidly regulated discipline of a group? This is a particularly crucial question for one of the dancers. Cassie is set apart from the others by age, level of talent, and experience. Cassie broke in as a chorus girl, worked steadily, and developed a distinctive personal style. She began to be cast as a "featured dancer" and later moved to Hollywood. She won a couple of minor dance roles in movies, and then her career came to a standstill. She was forced to support herself by doing commercials, which, according to Cassie, is the worst indignity a dancer can have to bear.

Now she wants to go back to the line. How can she go back, Zack demands, given her level of achievement? More to the point, will she be able to conform her style to the uniformity of the line, now that she kicks a bit higher, snaps her head, shoulders, arms, and hands a bit

**In retrospect, it appears that *A Chorus Line*, which began its long run in the middle of the decade, reflects the essential socio-political dilemma of the 1970s.**

sharper, and extends every gesture and movement a bit further, a bit more distinctively? To this challenge Cassie returns a simple imperative statement: "God, I'm a dancer. A dancer dances," she sings. She will tone down her style; she will conform to the regularity of the line; she will suppress her individuality for the opportunity to dance. There is a trade-off involved, but to do other would be to deny self. Dancing is being. Such a clear vision of what one must do is enviable.

When, near the end of the show, one of the dancers, Paul, falls, twists his knee, and must be carried in excruciating pain from the stage, the rest of the group consider the reality of their situation: their ability to dance, the thing that they live for and that enables them to live, depends absolutely on the durability of their fragile bodies. Zack puts another question to them, "What if you couldn't dance anymore?" Sobered by Paul's sudden exit, they respond variously. Some bitterly. Some brightly. Some desperately. Some cynically. Each has translated Zack's question for himself, "What if you couldn't *be you* anymore?"

The final question of *A Chorus Line* occurs simultaneously to every member of the group. "Why have I given so much of myself to dance in a chorus line?" "I did," comes the answer in the ballad, "What I did for Love." Love of what? Of the audience? Of performing? For those who look into identity's mirror and see a dancer, the logical answer is "for love of self."

In retrospect, it appears that *A Chorus Line,* which began its long run in the middle of the decade, reflects the essential socio-political dilemma of the 1970s. After more than thirty years of ascendancy the collectivist response to life and its problems reached its zenith in the Sixties and apparently burned itself out. In the next decade, the pendulum of American lifestyle swung, some say drastically, toward concern for the cultivation of self. Yet one of the themes of the "me decade" (perhaps the "me epoch") is the longing for community and collective action. Such longing may be merely a matter of nostalgia or it may stem from the dawning realization that personal identity blooms only when cultivated within a group.

*A Chorus Line* is in no way a socio-political polemic in the way that *Hair* was for its time. It's a superb amalgam of all the talents that make Broadway worth the expense of time, energy, and money. It's the kind of dancing and singing and acting that each one of us should have the chance to experience—together.

### *Morning Prayer*

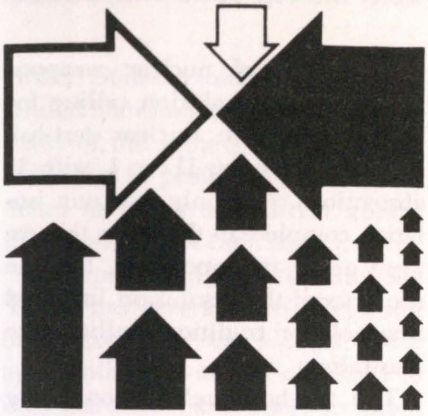
This desk at the wall,
These shelves of silent novels
Step by step above it to the ceiling
Whose titles once indulged acquisitive fingers
At sales by Goodwill or University Women
Or Salvation Army,
But now rest resigned of pleading that I read them
With eyes, not hands and lips to blow the dust away;

The Haitian child's picture risking to smile
At a photographer in a mission in Port-au-Prince,
The yellow pencils and box of tissues,
The tired stereo with its cracked dustcover
Playing, "Yes, through Him I'll conquer all"
In a male duet cut in Waco
Before John Kennedy died in Dallas,
Changing to Pavarotti and *Agnus dei*
Faster than I can feel it,
Symbolize it,
And set it down
In this virgin groove
For the sapphire horn
Of the adroit mind's ready tracing.

All these things, wanting God, were here all night
While I slept again in compromise with my Furies,
Like Orestes bartering fears in that bazaar
Of half-remembered phantasms all-but-faded,
Exchanging in the dark
The old panics of abandonment at the Rapture
For the latest cancelled-ticket weekend grief
Of not living long enough to do anything
As clever as my dullest daydream,
And woke to every imagination of the thoughts of my heart,
This Bible,
This cup of instant coffee,
And You.

**Joe McClatchey**

# The Nation



## Alone in a Crowd

### The United States Risks International Isolation

**Albert R. Trost**

**The U.S., along with Israel and South Africa, has become increasingly isolated in international bodies.**

If votes in international organizations and conferences are any indication, the United States, along with Israel and South Africa, is firmly identified as one of the negative forces in the world and has become increasingly isolated in the stands which it takes in these international bodies. This isolation is not a sudden occurrence, nor can it be dated from the start of the Reagan Administration. It must be conceded, however, that President Reagan and his colleagues have not arrested the isolation. In fact, the rhetoric of the present Administration has made the "losing" position of the United States in these international bodies more dramatic.

At least since 1950, South Africa and Israel have been in an isolated position in international meetings, subjected to much verbal abuse and finding themselves in a very small minority in lopsided votes. South Africa has been in this position because of its maintenance of a policy of racial segregation and the oppression of a large proportion of its population. Israel has been isolated since its formation in the late 1940s because of the displacement of a large number of Palestinians at the founding, and also because of the opposition of the surrounding Arab states to its very existence. Israel's position has not been helped by subsequent wars with its neighbors that were perceived as victories for the unjust Israeli cause.

Through the 1950s the Soviet Union stood in the isolated position that the United States now occupies. The other members of international bodies were ready to ostracize the Soviet Union because of the record of repression in Communist countries. As is well known, the relative positions of the United States and the Soviet Union began to change in 1961 when many African and Asian nations received their independence and became legitimate participants in international organizations and conferences. These new nations were characterized by their common background as colonies of Western nations and their hostility to colonialism or any other form of dependency in the international system. Their numbers grew dramatically through the 1960s and early 1970s.

At first, the former colonial powers, like France, the United Kingdom, and Portugal joined South Africa and Israel as the targets of a new assertive anti-colonial majority in international meetings. However, as formal and legal colonial relations were ended, new relationships of dependency became the focus. American involvement in Vietnam helped to identify the United States as an enemy, but the most important factor in the isolation of the United States was a changing view of its economic and technological dominance of the non-Communist world.

Initially the new nations of the world were impressed by the record of the United States in ending its own colonial status and by America's impressive progress toward super-power status. They saw America's moral and economic strength as a source for their own independence and growth. The rhetoric of the Kennedy Administration encouraged what were probably unrealistic expectations from the beginning. Some might describe the aid that the United States gave the new nations as generous or benevolent. However, it was not enough to achieve the kind of growth that the new nations expected, progress toward the standards of living that they saw in the United States and Western Europe. What help did come always seemed to have "strings" attached.

The aid the new nations received did not end dependence on the former colonial powers and it seemed to provoke even more interference in the affairs of the dependent country. Frustration abounded. Outside of providing an ideological explanation for the plight of the new nations and giving moral encouragement to their anti-imperialist stance, the Soviet Union and its allies managed to distance themselves from the dependency patterns. Occasional lapses such as the invasion of Afghanistan or support for Vietnam against China and Cambodia have earned the Soviets mild and temporary reminders of their former isolation. However, the strong trend toward the continued isolation of the United States continues.

The review just completed is perhaps too simple and too familiar to need repeating. The isolation of the United States cannot be attributed solely to frustration and irrational scapegoating by the majority of the world's nations who are either poor or allies of the Soviet

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**We have earned the hostility of most of the world through word and action (or inaction) by Presidents from both political parties over the last twenty years.**

Union. We have earned the hostility of most of the world through word and action (or inaction) by Presidents from both parties over the last twenty years. Sometimes the words and actions came from people and interests over whom the President has no constitutional control. In general, words and inaction have gotten us into more trouble than overt actions. The Soviet Union has seemed far more adept in the use of words and the explanation of its own inactions and actions. It has avoided the isolation that has been our plight. We also compound our isolation by identifying our cause and interests with Israel, and to a lesser extent South Africa, both of whom have managed to achieve their negative images on their own.

The plight of the United States is well-illustrated by three "votes" in various institutional contexts during this past December. They all have in common the extreme isolation of the United States in a very small minority. In some cases the isolation was intensified by the tendency of the Reagan Administration to put its position in honest, blunt, and combative terms. The current Administration is also committed to an ideological view whose basic principles are not widely shared in the world today. This view includes an appeal to individual freedoms, private enterprise, anti-Communism, and a leadership role for the United States in defending these principles. Recent American Presidents, most foreign policy elites, and the majority of the American people favor these principles, but not with the vigor or the directness of the Reagan Administration. A few of our allies are still sympathetic to these appeals, but seem embarrassed by the way we put our case. The three cases are illustrative of a much larger pattern.

On December 10, 1982, the General Assembly of the United Nations passed by a vote of 108 to 13 (with 13 abstentions) a resolution affirming the right of a nation state to stop or "jam" incoming radio and television broadcasts. On this occasion, eleven of our NATO allies, plus Japan and Israel, joined the United States in opposing the resolution. We were not completely isolated, nor was the stand different from that taken by other recent Administrations. The major principle that we used in defending our position was that of "freedom of information" or the free flow of ideas. It is not hard to see how the principle of free enterprise could also reinforce the position of the Administration.

**America's isolation has been intensified by the Reagan Administration's tendency to put its position in honest, blunt, and combative terms.**

On the other hand, the vast majority of nations in the world see a threat from broadcasts and broadcast technology that originate in the West. They see a threat to their own culture from the glossy production of foreign television programs. They see dependence on the West for broadcast equipment. Authoritarian regimes are also threatened by the possible use of broadcasting from outside their countries for the subversion of the government of the day. The United States and Western Europe and Japan, speaking from the position of superior broadcasting technology, confidence in their own culture, and liberal democracy, would be in favor of freedom of broadcasting. It is a privileged position that only a few other nations—thirteen to be exact—felt they could afford.

The day before, December 9, 1982, the United States found itself in even a smaller minority on three votes. The subject on this day was the banning of nuclear weapons tests. On one resolution calling for a comprehensive nuclear test-ban treaty the vote was 111 to 1, with 35 abstentions. Not only was our isolation complete in the sense that we were alone in opposition, but the sponsors of the resolution included some of our traditional allies, like Australia.

The test-ban itself is something that previous Administrations had a part in negotiating, but it never received the support of the United States Senate. The obstacle to approving such a ban in the Senate was the lack in the proposed treaty of specific means of verifying compliance with a complete test-ban. Distrust of the Soviet Union by President Reagan and his supporters was enough in this case to change the position of the United States from lukewarm support for a comprehensive test-ban treaty to lonely opposition.

The most dramatic case of isolation also came in December as the long-running Law of the Sea Conference finally ended in Jamaica with the signing by 117 nations of a treaty codifying law for the seas. The drafting of this treaty had taken almost a decade of hard negotiations and had seen the active participation of four American Administrations. As President Carter left office in 1981, grudging American agreement with the text of the treaty seemed near. As the nations met in Montego Bay in mid-December to sign the treaty, the United States was among 25 who would not sign at that time, and the only one to state that it would never sign the existing draft of the treaty.

Since the United States had been one of the initiators of the conference in the first place, had been an active participant in negotiating the draft, and had looked as if it might sign as the final session got under way, many of the signers of the treaty had a field day in attacking the

**The main opposition to the U.S. is a sense of frustration over global distribution of resources.**

United States. Hostility toward the United States was increased by what many of the signers perceived as a defense of its position by the United States in terms of a direct appeal to free-enterprise capitalism.

The proposed Law of the Sea Treaty has several parts. Rejection of the treaty by the United States apparently is based on objection to only one of the parts, a section which would bring the enterprise of mining the seabed under international control. The technology to gather mineral nodules from the bottom of the sea is an area in which the United States is out in front of other nations. In the absence of international regulation, the United States could be expected to lead in the exploitation of the nickel, manganese, copper, and cobalt from the sea, much as American companies took the lead in the early off-shore drilling for oil.

With its lead in technology it is easy to see that the short-term interest of the United States lies in unrestrained exploitation. This perception of the national interest goes along nicely with the commitment of President Reagan to private enterprise and free competition. The *New York Times* (December 10, 1982) quoted the American representative at the signing as saying, "The political and economic costs of international control can become too high. Each nation must now evaluate how to protect its interests." The American delegate admitted that the Americans were "the whipping boys."

The poorer nations in the world want a share of the income from the exploitation of the minerals. Because of the lag in technology, they could never get this on their own. Therefore, the treaty makes provision for sharing the technology and the exploitation. The anger of the majority of nations toward the United States is illustrated in the words of the delegate from the Cameroon, also quoted in the *New York Times* (December 9, 1982).

> The United States cannot afford the discomforts of isolation. . . .There are many ways of retaliation. Do you want to fight everybody? Actions of this type may find repercussions where nobody ever thought, in the political and economic fields.

In the short term, the United States may well be able to "afford" the consequences of isolation on the Law of the Sea Treaty and the other issues mentioned in this article. The General Assembly of the United Nations certainly has no way to enforce its resolutions. As regards the Law of the Sea Treaty, custom in international law recognizes that nations that do not sign and ratify treaties are not bound by them. Of course, this does not preclude political and economic sanctions against the United States by aggrieved nations, in the manner of the oil boycott by O.P.E.C. in the 1970s.

In the longer term, the United States would do well to note the fact that the vast majority of nations in the world have expressed at least symbolic opposition to us in almost every global arena for the last fifteen years. Although this opposition has not yet extended to every issue, the number of states opposing our position has not decreased. The opposition, as indicated best in the Law of the Sea case, is a cry of frustration over the global distribution of resources. The frustration is even more intense because of the current world-wide economic contraction.

It is unrealistic to expect the United States and other rich nations to give up enough of their own resources to significantly raise the standard of living in all the poor nations of the world. However, our inaction and rhetoric have served to increase the frustration of the majority of nations. The votes and the isolation are a clear warning.

# LETTERS From Dogwood, VA

## An Idiosyncratic Susceptibility to Texts

**Charles Vandersee**

Dear Editor:

I was at the downtown public library here in Dogwood the other day when a strange thing happened. One of my idiosyncrasies cried out for expression; it seemed to crave analysis.

This occurred as I gazed at the floor by my chair. We have remodeled the old post office into a tasteful—even serene—new library, and it is difficult not to swing by a couple of times a month, to keep up with some of the magazines. Downtown happens to be thriving here in Dogwood, despite the big new Fashion Square mall north of town, but even with a thriving downtown there are plenty of parking spaces on Market Street, and lots of vacant chairs in the library reading room. Dogwood people, Americans, distrust the unglossy, and are not studying for exams.

On the floor by my chair, after an hour, some magazines lay in a pile: *The New York Review of Books, Christian Century, Christianity Today, New*

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**When I say that I'm delighted by the freedom we now have to study texts of all kinds, I am not necessarily endorsing some new mandarinism or egalitarianism.**

*Republic, National Review, American Scholar, Commentary, Architectural Record, American Heritage.* Like Thoreau in *Walden,* who conflated two years in the woods into one, I confess that this list combines two or three visits. Nonetheless, this pile is a pretty accurate clue to possibly the master idiosyncrasy of my life: a susceptibility to texts.

I say "texts" deliberately, in satisfaction with one particular drift of literary fashion these days. A "text" is any piece of writing: a Keats poem; *Antigone* by Sophocles; a Los Angeles weather forecast ("Light to moderate eye irritation in the Valley"); a classic Volkswagen ad by Doyle, Dane & Bernbach; any of the 66 parts of the anthology called the Bible; and so forth.

English teachers like myself used to live under an Index Librorum Prohibitorum. You were not supposed to take much interest in magazines (ephemera) or in certain kinds of books: showbiz memoirs, trash fiction, pop theology (whether Alan Watts or Hal Lindsey), screwball investment treatises, and Kahlil Gibran. Much less an interest in certain vulgate documents: small-town American newspapers, campaign literature, tracts, travel pamphlets, and instruction manuals. You could admit to being mildly plagued by these, and in accidentally happening upon one of them you might find it pernicious or quaint, but you certainly did not find it engrossing as a manifestation of language. These texts existed to fill up space at the ends of long *New Yorker* articles.

When I say I'm delighted by the freedom we now have to study texts of all kinds, I am not necessarily endorsing some new mandarinism or egalitarianism. The celebrated book *S/Z,* by Roland Barthes, 200 pages of commentary on a 30-page story by Balzac, is not, however, such a terribly mad act. And it might even be salutary if for a while critics stopped tromping over Shakespeare's blood-drenched Albion and gazed steadily at Woody Allen's Manhattan. The point is that now, for at least the present breathing space in cultural history, it is acceptable to express minute interest in all writing. An English teacher can simulate membership in the human community for once; not more than a few years ago one was only a dragon grammarian or a "guardian of our literary heritage" —either a fire-breathing anachronism or a doorkeeper at the intensive care ward, helping the patient die with decorum.

When I looked at the pile of magazines by my left foot, I did not instantly see it as a key to any idiosyncrasy. I merely enjoyed the color, the disorder, the cultural and ideological contradiction represented by these various texts, much as one takes pleasure in a picture of St. Basil's Cathedral, swirls of gaudy domes, in austere Red Square.

I then saw this pile of magazines as creditable; it appeared to show a certain catholicity of mind, but not an unbridled eclecticism. The presence of such raging antagonists as, say, "T.R.B." of the *New Republic* and Norman Podhoretz of *Commentary* seemed to say I was monitoring the whole spectrum of American social thinking. (There did come to mind at this point a black member of the university faculty, raised in the inner city, who thinks this superb American spectrum of thought stretches from A to only perhaps F.)

What did I eventually mean, though, by "susceptibility" to diverse texts as idiosyncratic? Something like this: All pieces of writing are multiple messages, and my uncontrollable habit is to notice in each piece of writing the tension between overt messages and subversive messages. Most of us do this to some degree; for me it's merely an obsession. Overtly, most writers are reasonable, except such Barnums of the page as Mencken and Tom Wolfe. Covertly, however, every writer has a special in-group not to offend and has a quiver of words tipped with special connotations. These facts sometimes make ordinary texts very rich—and rather slow reading.

Susceptibility can mean something more extreme: the fascinated recognition that certain texts exist autonomously. No one writes them. Here is one cover-story sentence, for example, from the first issue (September 15, 1982) of the Gannett national newspaper, *USA Today:* "In the aggressively adolescent Sun Belt, there's something new these days: its suburbs, like those of older cities to the north, are grappling with growing pains." This first edition of *USA Today* sits in a pile of reading matter in my kitchen; with a sentence as rich as that, I can't bear to throw it away.

What messages am I getting from it? The first is that I have in my hand reading matter only. The text was neither written nor edited. Like most wire service stories and much syndicated copy, it just appeared. No *writer* can say of something—in the lead sentence yet—that it is "grappling" with "growing pains." No mind was active here, since real writing—and real editing—require accurate imaging. When in the next sentence the national recession is so banal as to be "taking its toll," I conclude that I've already received several other messages from *USA Today*:

1. Despite the box in the corner saying that the new paper wishes to be "refreshing," it has not chosen the one thing in American newspaper journalism necessary for that refreshment: prose with thinking and imaging behind it. (Colorful graphics it has, yes.)

2. Despite technological advance (transmission to nationwide printing plants by satellite), *USA Today* tolerates a reactionary style, a rigid

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and corrupt orthodoxy: glibness, unserviceable alliteration, and dead metaphor.

3. Since a rigid and corrupt orthodoxy in journalism puts a reader about as far away from truth as a rigid and corrupt orthodoxy in churchdom puts a believer away from God, Gannett is (at least in September) not much interested in its professed aim of being "enlightening" (though it may succeed in being "informative," through graphs and stats).

Gannett is not alone. Newspapers, rich as they are—and much as I crave them—fail me by failing language, as do newsmagazines still, notoriously. This is one reason I read magazines such as those mentioned earlier. I look for contradictory perspectives on issues. I want the exact words and intonation that any partisan uses, rather than the glib, vacuous language I will get through a news story. The partisan, after all, before some other medium tries to give a gist of him, is already pandering and concealing.

Thus the idiosyncrasy I'm describing is not only an ingrained fascination with pathology in language, but a conviction that the "truth" of a matter is always receding so fast that human efforts can't keep up. This being the case, the substitution of rigid and corrupt orthodoxies for careful thought and imaging, and for energetic pursuit of the truth, seems to me surrender and even death: a genuine perversion of what it means to be human.

I suppose it's not as sinful to read a newspaper as it is to produce one, or to do some other things, such as watch people dying of starvation in the midst of plenty, or to take actual part in battles of rigid orthodoxies, or to impugn the imaginations of people working toward the new orthodoxy of a world without weapons. But it does seem that one of the fashions of our present morality is to let ourselves off a little too easily—to fail to imagine what may lie out there beyond the messages we receive. An analysis of this one idiosyncrasy of mine thus leads to an assessment of the health of my imagination.

This semester I'm teaching writing again, for the second spring in a row, after several years of not teaching it. We are fortunate in having a large number of students who want an intermediate writing course—not the basics of freshman composition but a more energetic pursuit of what lies out there. They come to the first meetings of class terribly apprehensive; is there really enough out there to supply 1,000 words a week?

**Hypothesis: that a connection exists between clear, truthful prose and a healthful state of not only the imagination but the soul.**

I am still not sure where such deplorable naiveté is bred, and I think it matters a great deal, though I haven't investigated. But we press on. We stick to two main subjects all semester, rather than discrete, unrelated weekly topics, and by the end of the semester they have learned not only how to generate questions, to imagine, to interview, and to compose, but how to build a structure of 20 pages or so.

Our two main subjects are the state of education in the U.S. today, from the perspective of one university, and the relation of each student's family history to U.S. history. An early paper asks: "How well were you prepared for college?" I point out gently that they can't really answer this until they get out and pursue other students, interviewing to find out kinds and degrees of preparation. We don't know ourselves until we know something about people out there.

Soon they interview a graduating student: "How satisfied are you with your education?" They interview a member of the faculty: "What do you think constitutes a good college education?" They read each other's papers, and then base a paper on this body of material. By the end of the semester certain of their weekly papers, refined, become sections of a larger paper.

The topics they see ahead of time on the syllabus, and after a while anxiety dissipates. Out there, in books and among people you can visit, lies not only complexity but interest and surprise. You can imagine, but you can't quite predict. An economist entered his field circuitously, through Latin-American studies. A professor of medieval literature passionately wants you to study calculus and computers. Then, in class, what we talk about are ways of being faithful to complexity and surprise. The ways of shaping are many. A subject may be small, but truth is large—larger than a few newspaper paragraphs.

However, the characteristics of good composing, of *real* writing, are few. We don't depart from them. I mentioned two in this space in December: using the plain style and finding better expressions. The first of these is an orthodoxy pure and undefiled that goes back to "Let there be light." The second of these appears to have animated the prophet Micah, when he raised the question, "What does the Lord require of you?" and answered it with three bold phrases—do right, love merry, live humbly—challenging a rigid and corrupt orthodoxy of infidelity.

As a teacher I don't go into these particular textual examples, however. Certain of my more exotic idiosyncrasies I prefer to hide. One of them, I've discovered, is this hypothesis: that a connection exists between clear, truthful prose and a healthful state of not only the imagination but the soul.

From Dogwood, yours faithfully,

C.V.

# Books

## The Hidden-Hand Presidency

***Eisenhower as Leader.*** **By Fred I. Greenstein. New York: Basic Books. 286 pp. $16.95.**

In the September 1967 issue of *Esquire,* Murray Kempton wrote an article entitled "The Underestimation of Dwight Eisenhower." Many thought the piece tongue-in-cheek, because Kempton argued diametrically against the conventional liberal wisdom, which pictured Eisenhower as a bland and ineffectual leader. Eisenhower, he argued, was "the great tortoise upon whose back the world sat for eight years," a complex, devious, and masterful politician, who was "the model of that perfect statesman of Voltaire's ironic dream, the one who could learn nothing from Machiavelli except to denounce Machiavelli." Eisenhower was a politician of such skill that we never knew it.

Kempton's piece evoked amusement, but as the years went by, it lingered in the memory: was there more to good old Ike than met the eye? By the late 1970s, there was a change in both popular and academic opinion concerning Eisenhower, or at least a revision that changed Eisenhower's reputation. One sensed this watching the 1979 TV docudrama *Ike,* which depicted the wartime Eisenhower as "America's last hero." The American historians who once ranked Eisenhower in the bottom third in their rankings of Presidents now rank him in the top ten. A recent *New York Times/CBS News* poll revealed that the electorate as a whole, when asked to choose which among all past Presidents they would like to see in office now, ranked Ike fourth, behind only Kennedy, Franklin Roosevelt, and Truman.

The reassessment of Eisenhower has become an academic cottage industry, especially with the recent opening of his private diaries, Presidential documents, and secretarial file. Almost everyone involved in the Eisenhower boom admits that the reappraisal of Eisenhower is linked to the fate of subsequent Presidencies. Eisenhower was the last President to last two terms, to leave office alive with his reputation intact, to have presided over an era of peace *and* prosperity. Eisenhower in retrospect becomes the conservative who conserved and legitimated the New Deal, ended the Korean war and resisted direct involvement in Indochina, controlled the military and tried to make peace with the Russians, brought domestic prosperity without high inflation.

So both conservatives and liberals can find something to point to that endears him: Eisenhower warned both of the "military-industrial complex" and of excessive domestic spending. For both liberal and conservative Presidents, Eisenhower has become one of the benchmarks by which they will be judged. This may be unfair, but retrospective revision is in the nature of historical and journalistic establishments, and so current Presidents are judged by who is "in" at the moment.

It is not at all inconceivable, of course, that the next generation will find Ike "out" again. Eisenhower, skeptics may say, was lucky he didn't have to deal with grave problems that came to a head later, problems which he helped to create by ignoring them: the black revolution, the persistence of poverty, bland cultural conformity, the concentration of corporate power. Indeed, it may be asked, how much of a success *was* Ike, subsequent Presidential disasters notwithstanding? Is this not the President who expanded the cold war, increased the threat of nuclear conflict, flopped at the summit over the U-2, saw prosperity slide into recession, witnessed a Democratic landslide in the 1958 Congressional elections, and failed to get his chosen successor (Nixon) elected?

In any case, the Eisenhower literature burgeons. Now Fred Greenstein has written an absorbing book on Eisenhower as leader, focusing more on his "hidden-hand" style than on the question of his concrete accomplishments. (Greenstein admits, it should be noted, that he voted for Adlai Stevenson twice, and has no regrets.) He didn't know then, he says, how effective Eisenhower was because so much of what Ike did went on backstage: "As an outsider I could not then have known the centerpiece of my present knowledge—that behind Eisenhower's seeming transcendence of politics was a vast amount of indirect, carefully concealed effort to exercise influence."

Greenstein's thesis is simple enough: the American President must play two contradictory roles, as head of State and as chief executive, as a unifying constitutional monarch and as a divisive prime minister. The non-political President, as a symbolic figure "above politics," loses popular confidence and trust by playing partisan politics. But if he doesn't play politics, and do it well, things drift, and he may get blamed for poor leadership.

So what to do? "On the assumption," says Greenstein, "that a president who is predominantly viewed in terms of his political prowess will lose public support by not appearing to be a proper chief of state, Eisenhower went to great lengths to conceal the political side of his leadership." Thus his "professional reputation" among Washington politicians, journalists, and intellectuals became the public one of the "father figure," the kindly national hero who reigned but did not rule, and let others—Dulles, Nixon, Sherman Adams—do the policymaking and politicking, and by letting things drift gave rise to alternate sources of power—Lyndon Johnson and Sam Rayburn, the Warren Court, Joe McCarthy.

Greenstein then documents how Eisenhower went about his private,

"hidden-hand" way of getting political results without damaging his public image as the benign hero above the fray. Eisenhower seems to have reasoned that he would have to abandon a public reputation (what Richard Neustadt called his "professional reputation" among the Washington political elite) as a tough and powerful politician in favor of his reputation among the masses. He could then conduct covert political activities unknown to the public, and retain the love of the many. Apparently he felt the source of his power lay in his remarkable and consistent public popularity, and he could thus disregard the contempt in which he might be held by committee chairmen or newspaper columnists.

Eisenhower was, after all, a national hero elected because of his non-political stature; to sully that would be to squander his major political resource, his "nonpoliticalness." So the common and artless talk of his public speeches and press conferences was designed for public consumption, to charm or confuse; the private discourse was reasoned, cold, and full of sharp political judgments. The artless but beloved public man was adept in private dealings with other leaders, and good at winning public support. The easy-going and relaxed golfer kept up a brutal schedule.

Perhaps the most interesting and compelling aspect of the private Eisenhower in retrospect is the acuity of his political judgments. He tells his brother, "Should any political party attempt to abolish social security and eliminate labor laws and farm programs, you would not hear of that party again in our political history." He tells the Joint Chiefs concerning discussion of military intervention in Southeast Asia, "the United States might not deem it wise to intervene in certain instances where a Communist takeover was very far advanced."

His attention to political strategy is striking: "the task of the political leader is to devise plans among which humans can make constructive progress." "Reserve all criticism for the private conference; speak only good in public." As Kempton had pointed out, he was ruthless in using his troops to maintain his public image. When Press Secretary James Hagerty would complain that he would "catch hell" if he said to the press what Ike wanted him to, Eisenhower would just smile and say, "My boy, better you than me." Eisenhower's unwillingness to publicly condemn McCarthy was, Greenstein claims, part of a political strategy aimed at creating the conditions for McCarthy's political destruction. All in all, the book concludes, Eisenhower's conception of the task of politics was "less to solve problems than to prevent them." His penchant for making private agreements, avoiding public discord, and seeking bipartisan accommodation was a ruling style that has many virtues.

Such a style is hard to duplicate. No President since Eisenhower has come to that office with the heroic legacy he brought with him. But the Eisenhower style of leadership is not unique to him. The "nonpolitician," "antipolitician," "citizen-politician," the amateur in politics who is somehow above it but will also somehow master it, is a strain in American political culture that goes as far back as Andrew Jackson and is as recent as Ronald Reagan. (The style works better in some circumstances than in others. Jackson and Eisenhower were national heroes; Reagan is only a national celebrity and is thus more clearly partisan.)

If Greenstein is right, Eisenhower solved the problem of the American Presidency, remaining a "nonpolitician" and thus preserving his bedrock of public admiration while adroitly playing politics. He was the politician who indeed had nothing to learn from Machiavelli except not to appear Machiavellian. It has often been argued that Americans are a profoundly anti-Machiavellian people. If that is the case, then the clue to Eisenhower's success—or at least his revived reputation—is that he understood, and tapped, the American desire for governing without government, for political innocents who rule without politics, for leaders who lead by not leading. It is rare for a President to use this recurrent strain successfully, and the current President may fondly hope that he is as successful with it as Eisenhower.

**James Combs**

### *Autumn*

The year falls
into place about this season.
Spring's exhilaration
looks a mite less new, unprecedented,
viewed across the open oven days of August.
While March's dreary waiting
for the earliest touch of green
seems plain ridiculous when seen along
these bold and vivid avenues.

Yet gold begins to fall
just as it forms, and glory
starts to shed itself before
the robe is fully donned.
Now harvest sounds its mellow, winding horn,
while we stretch tall
as corn before the reaper.

**J. Barrie Shepherd**

# Campus Diary

## The Legacy Of Alfred Meyer

**John Strietelmeier**

Many years ago, at a meeting of the Association of American Geographers, a geographer whom I did not know well looked at my name tag, saw that I was from Valparaiso University, and said: "How come Lutherans are so big in geography?"

I had never actually thought about the matter, but when he mentioned it I, too, became curious about it. At that time, two of the most respected names in American geography were those of Herb Gross, head of the Department at Concordia Teachers College (River Forest), and Alfred Meyer, head of our department at Valparaiso. Both served as president of the National Council of Geography Teachers. Dr. Gross also served for many years as editor of *The Journal of Geography* and Dr. Meyer served a term on the Council of the A.A.G.

I have never come up with a satisfactory answer to my colleague's question about the symbiosis of Lutherans and geography. But the question led me into some fascinating byways. I came, for instance, to know Dr. Wilhelm Sihler, an early leader of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod who had been a student of Karl Ritter, one of the co-founders of modern geography, at the University of Berlin. And I became acquainted with the geographical work of A. L. Graebner, a Missouri Synod theological professor at the turn of the century, whose atlas was widely used in the Synod's parochial schools. And I came to appreciate the remarkable achievements of the teacher-scholar who had founded and for many years headed our own department, Dr. Meyer.

We are celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of our department this academic year and we plan to culminate the celebration with a day-long bash of worship, luncheoning, speech-making, and reunion on the 27th of this month. The date was chosen because it happens to be Dr. Meyer's 90th birthday and there is at least a remote hope that his doctor might allow him to be with us for an hour or so. But with him or without him, we will be recognizing and renewing the heritage which he so largely created.

In any discipline, academic departments differ in philosophy and emphasis from one university to another. Certainly that is true in geography. The emphasis at Valparaiso during Dr. Meyer's long tenure as head of the department was on geography as an antidote to disaster. Bred in the Lutheran Pietist tradition, Dr. Meyer was, like Vergil, "majestic in [his] sadness at the doubtful doom of lost mankind." I remember him saying once, in a small group, that the Scriptures nowhere tell us that Jesus laughed but they do tell us that He wept. The import of this remark was clear enough: Christians do not do geography, any more than they do anything else, for their own amusement. They do it as a vocation, a calling, in which and through which they can make their contribution to the healing of the nations.

This profound seriousness about the discipline, coupled with a teleological concern which, in geographers, dates all the way back to Ritter, tempted Dr. Meyer to flirt for a number of years with the brilliant speculations of Ellsworth Huntington, a prolific research geographer at Yale often accused by his critics of being an environmental determinist. Like Huntington, Dr. Meyer would stoutly deny any deterministic leanings. But his personal cosmology of a sovereign God presiding over a universe of order undoubtedly reinforced his conviction as a geographer that things are not distributed randomly or whimsically over the face of the earth. His perhaps too frequent verbalizations of this essentially religious, purposive view of earth reality annoyed and, in at least one case, angered some of the top people in the profession and probably cost him the presidency of the A.A.G.

But the idea that "the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof" is as good a motivation and as legitimate a bias as any other that might underlie the scholarly work of a geographer. And it can be fruitful. It can, at the very least, correct any tendencies toward mere careerism and remind us that our research and teaching are fundamentally serious business, touching such questions as the nature of reality, the prospects for a viable future, and the responsibility which human beings have for each other. It can teach us awe in the presence of that holy thing, truth, whether "sacred" or "profane."

There are seven of us in the department today, carrying on the work which Dr. Meyer began. We are not all Lutherans, and even those of us who are would never be mistaken for Pietists. But much of the old Meyerian fervor—which some would consider naive and antique—survives. Beyond our differences, we are united in a kind of passionate conviction that this world and its people are important—and terribly threatened. And that any useful program for human survival must be firmly rooted in *Erdkunde*—knowledge of the earth—as it really is. And that the discovery and diffusion of such knowledge is truly a vocation, worthy of our best efforts.